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**FLITTERS, TATTERS,
AND THE COUNSELLOR**

AND OTHER SKETCHES





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FLITTERS, TATTERS, AND THE COUNSELLOR

AND OTHER SKETCHES

BY

THE AUTHOR OF 'HOGAN, M.P.,' ETC.

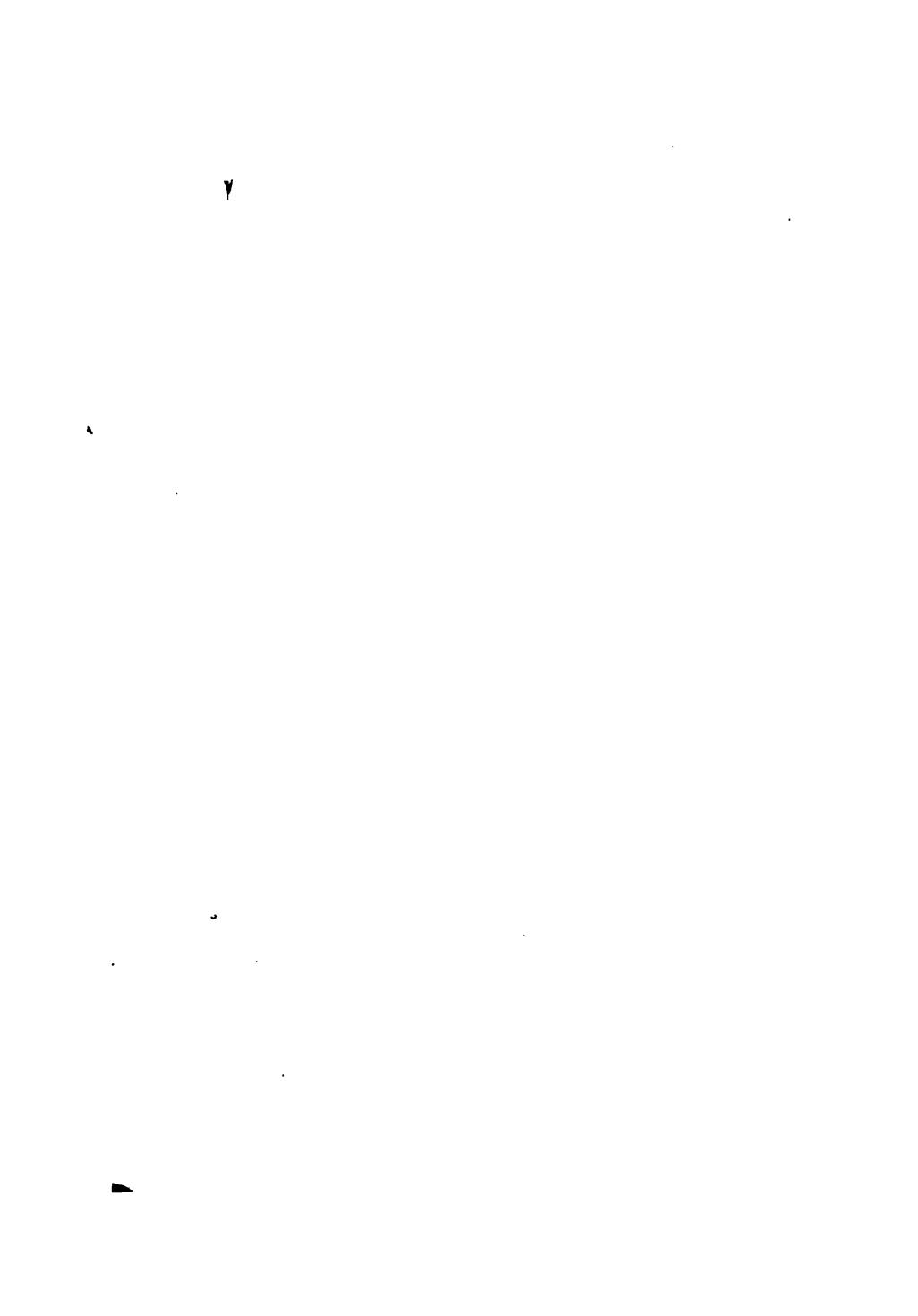


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**FLITTERS, TATTERS,
AND THE COUNSELLOR**



FLITTERS, TATTERS, AND THE COUNSELLOR.

LADIES first. Flitters, aged eleven, sucking the tail of a red herring, as a member of the weaker and gentler sex first demands our attention. She is older and doubly stronger than either Tatters or the Counsellor, who are seated beside her on the wall of the river, sharing with her the occupation of watching the operations of a mud-barge at work some dozen yards out in the water. Of the genus street arab Flitters is a fair type. Barefooted, of course, though were it not for the pink lining that shows now and again between her toes one might doubt that fact—bareheaded,

too, with a tangled, tufted, matted shock of hair that has never known other comb save that ten-toothed one provided by Nature, and which indeed Flitters uses with a frequency of terrible suggestiveness.

The face consists mainly of eyes and mouth; this last-named feature is enormously wide, so wide that there seemed some foundation for a remark of the Counsellor's made in the days of their early acquaintance, before time and friendship had softened down to his unaccustomed eyes the asperities of Flitters' appearance, and which remark was to the effect that only for her ears her mouth would have gone round her head. The Counsellor was not so named without cause, for his tongue stopped at nothing. This mouth was furnished with a set of white, even teeth, which glistened when Flitters vouchsafed a smile, and gleamed like tusks when she was enraged, which she was often, for Flitters had

a short temper and a very independent disposition. The eyes, close set, under overhanging, thick brows, were of a dark brown, with a lurid light in their depths. She was tall for her age, lank of limb, and active as a cat: with her tawny skin and dark eyes one might have taken her for a foreigner, were it not for the intense nationalism of the short nose and retreating chin and the mellifluousness of the Townsend Street brogue that issued from between the white teeth.

For attire she had a *princesse robe*, a cast-off perhaps of some dweller in the fashionable squares. This garment was very short in front, and disproportionately long behind, and had a bagginess as to waist and chest that suggested an arbitrary curtailment of the skirt. Viewed from a distance it seemed to have a great many pocket-holes, but on closer inspection these resolved themselves into holes without the pockets; underneath this was

another old dress, much more ancient and ragged. However, as it was summer weather, Flitters felt no inconvenience from the airiness of her attire. Indeed, to look at her now with her back against a crate of cabbages which was waiting its turn to take its place on board the Glasgow steamer, one would think she had not a care in the world. She was sitting upon one foot, the other was extended over the quay wall, and the sun shone full in her eyes, and gilded the blond curls of Tatters, who, half lying, half sitting close beside her, was musingly listening to the conversation of the Counsellor. Tatters was about six years old, small and infantine of look, but with a world of guile in his far-apart blue eyes. He could smoke and chew, drink and steal, and was altogether a finished young reprobate. He wore a funny, old jerry hat, without any brim, and with the crown pinched out, doubtless with a view to its harmonising with the

rest of his attire, the most prominent portion of which was undoubtedly the shirt. The front part of this seemed not to reach much below his breast-bone ; but whether to make amends for this shortcoming, or to cover deficiencies in the corduroy trousers, the hinder part hung down mid-thighs at the back. One leg of the corduroys was completely split up, and flapped loosely in front, like a lug sail in a calm. His jacket, which was a marvel of raggedness, was buttoned up tight ; and seated, hugging both his knees with his hands, he looked a wonderfully small piece of goods. He had an interesting, sweet, little face ; his little black nose was prettily formed ; a red cherry of a mouth showed in the surrounding dirt, and gave vent to the oaths and curses of which his speech was mainly composed, in an agreeable little treble pipe.

The Counsellor, or Hoppy, for he had two names, the second derived from a personal de-

formity which affected his gait, was nine years old, but might have been ninety, for the *Welt-kunst* his wrinkled, pock-marked countenance portrayed. He had small, bright, black eyes, and a sharp, inquisitive nose. A keen ready intelligence seemed to exude from every feature. He was the ruling spirit of the trio. Tatters' manner to him was undisguisedly deferential, and Flitters only maintained her individuality at the expense of a bullying ostentation of superior age and strength. They were all three orphans. Flitters' father had run off to America a year before ;—her mother was dead. Tatters was a foundling, whose nurse had turned him loose on the streets when she found no more money forthcoming for his maintenance, and the Counsellor's antecedents were wrapped in complete obscurity. He sometimes alluded mistily to a grandmother living in Bull Lane ; but he was one of those people who seem all-sufficient in themselves, and for whom one feels

instinctively, and at the first glance, that no one could or ought to be responsible. He had on a man's coat, one tail of which had been removed—by force, plainly, for a good piece of the back had gone with it, giving him an odd look of a sparrow which a cat has clawed a pawful of feathers out of. He had on a great felt hat, of the kind known as billycock, which overshadowed well his small, knowing face. He wore shoes of very doubtful fit or comfort, but still shoes, and thus distinguishing him from his companions, who, to borrow a phrase from their own picturesque dialect, were both “on the road.”

It may be asked whence they received their names. Hoppy knew of none but his nickname; his grandmother's name was Cassidy, which he did not scruple to appropriate if occasion required it. Flitters remembered to have been called Eliza once, and her father's name was Byrne ; but nicknames in the arab class are more common than names, which indeed are

practically useful only to people who have a fixed habitation—a luxury these creatures know nothing of. Tatters' name was likely, owing to an accident, to stick to him always. It was rumoured, rightly or wrongly, that Tatters had once, in company with the boys of a Christian Brothers' School he had patronised for a week, presented himself for confirmation. The officiating bishop put the usual preparatory question as to the name of the candidate.

Tatters had not expected this: however, no whit abashed, he answered simply and distinctly.

“What, my boy!” exclaimed the officiant, as if doubting his ears.

“Tatters, your reverence—iminen^cce, I mane.”

“And—who gave you that name, my boy?”

“The boys in the Coombe, sanguinary” (Tatters, though not brought up in the fear of the *Saturday Review*, used by preference a more

nervous Saxon term) “end to them, your riverence!”

Tatters was led out by the ears, and bade good-bye that day to church and school.

Flitters could not read. The Counsellor possessed all the education as well as most of the brains of the party. Nevertheless Flitters was its chief support. She sang in the streets. The Counsellor played the Jew’s harp or castanets, and sometimes sang duets with her, while Tatters stood by, looking hungry and watching for halfpence. They had other resources as well : coal-stealing along the wharfs, or sometimes sifting cinders on the waste grounds about the outskirts of the city, to sell afterwards ; messages to run for workmen—a very uncertain and precarious resource, as no one ever employed them twice. Altogether, their lives were at least replete with that element so much coveted by people whose every want and comfort is supplied—to wit, excitement.

A keen observer might have remarked beneath the apparent nonchalance and lassitude of the group a certain patient pre-occupation, at once watchful and passive. They were, in fact, waiting the arrival of the passengers of an afternoon Scotch boat, in order to pick up stray coppers from such of them as might be disposed to remunerate their musical performances. Times had been dull lately, and, with the exception of Flitters' herring-tail, which had fallen from the dinner-bundle of a dock-labourer, none of the party had dined.

The Counsellor was watching the tide as it rose nearer and nearer to the line where green slime and mud ended and dry granite began on the quay wall opposite. The boat was to leave at high tide, or thereabouts, and the greasy black ripples were rising fast with a dull, lapping sound on the stones. It was an August afternoon, a gray, warm haze hung over the river where it widened, far below, at the

Pigeon-house wall ; and the Custom House, with its granite pillars and goddesses, glistened and sparkled in the sun. Three gold streams seemed to gush from the arches of Carlisle Bridge ; and St. Patrick's cone-like steeple and the dome of the Four Courts, far above, seemed to dance in the waving, shimmering air.

The river craft went to and fro heedlessly, tug-boats gasping and quivering. A trim-looking pilot yacht, with her insignia in big black letters on the mainsail, skifted sidelong by. After it came a long-bodied, sharp-nosed, broad-beamed boat, so loaded with barrels that it was almost flush with the greasy water that swirled in great lazy curls in its wake, and puffing a thick black smoke from a tiny funnel in the stern.

The Counsellor started forward with a look of interest in his keen eyes.

“There’s wan ov Guinness’s barges. Look !

every barrel on her's worth six shillin', widout de porther at all."

"Ye lie!"

This courteous comment came from Flitters, and in no way conveyed any doubt as to the veracity of the statement. It was the customary expression of astonishment or negation in the gutter-language, and in this case meant the former purely, for the Counsellor was an authority on most points of general information.

"Don't I know a man found one floatin' off of the North Wall, below Martin's, and took it up to James's Street and got it!"

The six eyes followed with a longing, envious look after the piled-up treasures, each streaked with vivid red, and branded new from the famous brewery, the barge, as it swung by, keeping in the sinuous track left by the pilot.

Tatters was hungry, and his face looked pale beneath the coating of dirt.

“I wish ‘twas five,” he said plaintively, addressing Flitters. “I don’t see wan come yet.”

But at that moment they saw a cab just in sight over the swing-bridge of the docks, loaded with trunks and parcels, and full of people. The trio waited lazily until the vehicle had drawn up at the shed below, where a herd of cows had arrived some time before, and were in process of being shipped: then all three bounced up and set out in pursuit.

They took up their post on the quay wall, opposite the saloon deck of the steamer, and waited cheerfully until the passengers should have disposed their effects below, and come up to enjoy the fresh air on the deck.

More people arrived. It was the season when Dublin empties itself periodically, and before long Flitters was singing at the full pitch of her voice, “The Dark Girl dressed in Blue.” The Counsellor played a castanet

obbligato, and Tatters, leaning against the shed-wall, assumed his customary *air de circonstance*—this time without the slightest affectation.

Flitters' voice made up in volume what it lacked in quality. Singing in the open air is destructive to that laryngeal membrane on which, high authorities tell us, the delicacy of modulation depends. The sea and night air, to both of which it had been recklessly exposed, are particularly harmful. However, Flitters had an ear and some turn for mimicry. She had not visited, without profit, the music-halls of the Irish metropolis and the theatres where London Boucicault companies import new varieties of Irish brogue, and she gave out the patter with surprising voice and distinctness. She soon had a crowd assembled at the bulwark, and grinned and rolled her eyes at them while she knocked off her *repertorium*—to such good purpose that

before very long the pennies began flying very thickly. Then the Counsellor pocketed his castanets, and, standing at the extreme edge of the quay, made deft catches at the coins, like a practised wicket-keeper at high balls, while Tatters “fielded” in the background. For a good hour Flitters sang and grimaced, till it seemed as if the copper harvest was all gathered. She paused, panting, at last, the perspiration rolling down her sunburnt cheeks, and, singling out with her eye a benevolent countenance among those gathered watching her, she advanced, holding out the short foreskirt of the *princesse robe*, and made a comical bob to the whole gallery.

“ Wan copper for the honour and glory of God, Miss, jewel.”

“ You have enough,” replied some one who knew her, who had probably amused himself counting the gains.

“ Me mother is lyin’ sick, and me father’s

in hospital this two months wid a broken leg an' arm, an' she has nothin' but what me an' me little brothers takes her," Flitters went on rapidly, without a pause even for breath.

"Who ever saw such teeth and eyes! It's a gipsy, surely," muttered a newly-arrived tourist. Then, aloud, "Sing another song for me, my girl."

Flitters flashed a delighted grin back to him. She recognised his English accent, good always in the ears of her kind for double pay, and very appropriately struck up "Come back to Erin, mavourneen," for the bell had rung now, and they were fast clearing the ship of visitors. The Counsellor clattered the bones, and Tatters stood by with a smile of pleased expectancy on his smirched cherub countenance, while Flitters bawled out each word as clear as print, showing every one of her great white teeth like diamonds in the sun.

The first throb of the paddles made itself

felt and heard as she finished with a ringing screech “Killarney’s delight.” The passenger held some money in one hand, vainly fumbling with the other among a lot of half-crowns for something smaller. He could not find any lesser coin, and, deeming these too much, was about to return them to his pocket, when he caught sight of Tatters’ plaintive little figure, the shirt-tail drooping, and his head set wistfully to one side, watching him. He tossed the half-crown with such excellent aim that it went straight into one of Flitters’ frock pocket-holes, whence she extricated it unceremoniously, and, waving him her thanks, set off like the wind, lest some one who had seen their luck should follow and take it from them. The Counsellor, holding on his large hat with one hand, limped after as quickly as he could ; and Tatters, almost crying with impatience and hunger, trotted midway between him and Flitters.

Flitters drew up at last at an open yard-door, and, beckoning her followers, dived in behind it. They arrived in due course, breathless and exulting. Then began a reckoning up of accounts. Tenpence appeared from the solitary tail-pocket of the Counsellor's garment ; Tatters had about half that number in halfpence, and Flitters had the half-crown clenched in her fist. Three and sixpence-halfpenny in all. They stared at each other. Since the day the Counsellor found the roll of tobacco hid in a barrel that was lying at one of the foreign shipping-sheds they had not had such a sum. Some one, none of them knew which, breathed the word “theaytre.”

It was voted unanimously ; for, of course, now that they had a little money, their sole thought was to amuse themselves. In this they resembled their betters ; for is it not well known that the business of life in Ireland is amusement ? To be sure, they had already

seen the “Shaughraun:” but a good thing cannot be seen, any more than said, too often—and so that was settled.

“Come along to the divil to Mrs. Burke’s and get some supper.”

“At Mrs. Burke’s, eh ?” the Counsellor cut short the younger and more impetuous Tatters, in a dubious tone, eyeing Flitters questioningly, as if appealing to her final decision. Mrs. Burke’s was not a safe house to take such a valuable piece of property as half-a-crown to. No ; that would not do. The Counsellor reflected. If they went to Mrs. Burke’s in their present state of excitement she would suspect something. Moreover, if they fetched anything particularly dainty along with them, as they wished to do to celebrate this windfall, there would be risks attending that also.

While these weighty considerations were agitating each other under his billycock hat,

the prompter Flitters, with that more rapid power of combination and foresight that distinguishes the female brain, had seen her plan.

“ Whisht ! ” she cried authoritatively ; “ run up to the field behind them stables, and I’ll bring a can of porther an’ trotters and bread to yez. We’ll not go near the ould one.”

She was off like a dart ; and Tatters, after a short whine of hungry but impotent dissent, turned with the Counsellor, and they took their way up a reeking lane that ended at a piece of waste ground, where the refuse of the neighbourhood round was stored. They climbed the ditch, and lay down on the other side of it to wait the return of their Mercury.

In something more than half-an-hour Flitters’ head was projected over the top of the ditch, and greeting them with a vigorous oath, she demanded why they had not met her to help with the load. She handed the Counsellor a bright tin can, containing a quart or

more of black fluid, at the sight of which his wicked little eyes kindled greedily. The can was full to the brim. Flitters' loyal soul would have scorned to steal a march on her partners by taking an unfair drink on the road. Then from the skirt of the *princesse robe* she produced three brown rolls, selected of that colour in consideration of their superior size, each split longitudinally and buttered, and three sheep's feet, ready cooked.

There was little likelihood of their quarrelling over the division of the food. Flitters threw a whole roll and a trotter to each, and fastened her great, hungry teeth in her own share without more ado.

The Counsellor held the can lovingly between his legs with one hand; the billycock hat slid down over his eyes unheeded, and silence reigned, until Flitters, having devoured all the trotter except some fragments of closely adhering integument about the toes, which

she reserved as a sort of dessert for more leisurely disposal later on, stretched out her buttery fingers for the can.

“Dhrink fair now, bad luck to ye,” said the Counsellor, quoting without knowing it. “Down to there!” he added, marking a scratch on the outside of the can with his finger-nail. Then he pushed back his encroaching hat, so as to have a fair view.

Flitters replied with a curse, half of which was lost in the froth of the porter. She drew a long breath after the drink, and handed the vessel to Tatters, who, holding the trotter-bone in both hands to his mouth, was gnawing it eagerly. He laid it down to receive the can; but the Counsellor, moved perhaps more by regard for his own dignity than selfishness, stretched out both hands, with an inarticulate cry, his mouth being filled with bread. Tatters hugged the treasure tight, and swore volubly at him in reply. The Counsellor, in obedience

to a sign from Flitters, who, for the reason aforesaid, was still in authority, ordered Tatters to hurry. The urchin could drink his full share, and did so leisurely, feeling himself under Flitters' protecting ægis. Before long the can was finished amicably, and nothing remained of the provisions but a greasy, shapeless piece of Tatters' roll, which he thrust under his jacket for future refection. Flitters was tired after her exertions, and lay back against the ditch, languidly sucking the bare bone of the trotter. The Counsellor drained the can twice, then lay down flat on his back, making a pillow of his hat for his stubbly black head, all cropped round, except two locks over his forehead, purposely left to do manners with. Tatters drew up his heels and hugged his knees in his favourite attitude.

Conversation took that free-and-easy, convivial tone proper to post-prandial relaxation. Flitters' curses became more piquant and

ingenious now that she had leisure to recollect them. They discussed the merits of the cast playing the “Shaughraun,” with the critical acumen that distinguishes their race—all born actors. Then personal topics were reverted to, and finally the vexed question, ever recurring, if not always uppermost, of ways and means.

“Fourpence for the porther, and tuppence for butther, and threppence is ninepence, an’ the trotters fourpence-ha’penny—wan an’ three-ha’pence,” said the Counsellor, ticking off the numbers on his fingers with a speed that excited the admiration of the other two.

“Ay, an’ sixpence each to the (qualified) gallery is eighteen-pence, and breakquist to-morra an’—”

“An’ not to mintion the cab an’ the sup of whiskey-and-water for ‘fraid we’d be dry.”

This from the Counsellor, who was a humourist, set Flitters, whose speech he had

interrupted, and Tatters into a fit of laughter. The notion of a cab was irresistibly amusing.

“ An’ yez owe Mrs. Burke for two nights’ lodgin’, eh ?” said Tatters in a severe tone.

This reminder somehow clashed with the humour of his elders. To pay Mrs. Burke sixpence was no part of their scheme of amusement, and Flitters, with a frown, shelved the motion *sine die*. Suddenly she jumped up—

“ I’m going up to Patrick’s Close. Come along, Hoppy ; it’s going to six, and we’ll go down to the Royal then.”

“ I won’t go up that a way ; I’m tired, and I’ll lie here for a bit,” said Tatters peevishly, “ and then follow you and be at the door at seven.”

Flitters looked at him, and then taking out sixpence and some coppers from her hidden store gave Tatters his share of the half-crown.

“ Don’t ye spend it, ye pup !” said she in a threatening voice.

“Nothin’ like money,” replied Tatters, insouciantly, tossing the coppers up in the air and catching them again in his hand.

“Ah! money the divil!” said the Counsellor, with fine scorn. “People does be always talking of money—money! And in the end where’s the good of it? Laves it behind yez! Sure, won’t any one give ye a bit if ye want it; and so long as you’ve got a bit to ait what do you care?”

This certainly was after-dinner philosophy, and as a mere individual opinion worthless, though proceeding from a personage of such wide experience and high mental calibre as the Counsellor. But the Counsellor’s utterance in this case was not original by any means. He merely echoed the *credo* of the poorer classes, a creed, indeed, so well known, so often repeated, and so implicitly acted upon, that the very air is instipt with it. *What do you care so long as you have a bit to*

eat? and if you haven't it, won't any one give it to you? The history of the nation and the people is summed up in that sentence. The charity of the poor to the poor is boundless as the charity of God. Hence thrift is unknown and industry nullified. Poverty is the great and almost only necessary qualification for heaven ; therefore the poorer the better. Comfort, respectability, luxury, are for Protestants, Presbyterians, and such heretics, who are welcome to them, for is it not God's will that they should have them in this world, it being an article of faith that in the next they can have nothing ?

He and Flitters parted from their younger companion, who remained sitting in the field until they were well out of sight. Then he jumped up, and ran off in another direction.

The fact is, Tatters was a gambler, and he was now about to try his luck at pitch-and-toss with the boys of the railway station—

boys much older than, though quite ragged as, himself, and skilled in all the nefarious arts of tossing, of which there are many. In about an hour he had got rid of the sixpence, and realising that as matters were going he had better keep his remaining fourpence than send it after the rest, he turned off the steps of the Amiens Street Terminus and took his way down a dirty lane in the unsavoury vicinity of Mabbot Street.

Tatters was greatly depressed by the loss of his money; however, as he passed a grocer's shop, he saw a sugar-hogshead rolled out into the street by a man, and left standing on end before the door, and he soon forgot his troubles in the delightful employment of licking off the treacle that exuded from the seams. He was soon joined by a flock of youngsters, who, spying the dainty, pounced down on it to share it, and who created such an uproar and disturbance that the grocer rushed out and

put an end to their enjoyment by giving the hogshead a roll in the liquid mud of the thoroughfare. The flock dispersed sorrowfully, and Tatters pursued his way. After some ten minutes' walking he reached an archway which gave entrance to a lane running at right angles with the street and ending in a piece of waste ground. It was now after seven, and the dusk was falling, which favoured Tatters' purpose. This was to pass unnoticed by the double row of cottage doors until he reached the open ground at the end of the row. On this open ground there was a cottage standing by itself, which belonged to a friend of his whom it was his design now to visit; and he wished to reach her unobserved, for the second cottage on the right-hand side of the lane belonged to Mrs. Burke, who let lodgings to his friends and himself, and in whose debt they were. The lodgings consisted of space to lie down on the floor and a

ragged confederate blanket by way of coverlet. For this they paid a penny a night singly, but she usually allowed all three in for twopence —not too dear in a house of such respectability, where there was a magnificent pig for room-companion.

Tatters slipped by unsuspected, and soon gained the corner of his friend's residence. He trotted round to the open door, and lighted on the door-step as suddenly and unexpectedly as a bird. There he stood for an instant balancing from one foot to the other and looking in.

“Augh! there's himself,” cried a voice from the fireside, where the mistress and a “neighbour woman,” who had dropped in to pay a visit, were sitting together.

Tatters executed a sort of little dance on the flag as soon as he felt the eyes of both turned on him. This was meant to show his diffidence and unwillingness to intrude on

their privacy, and had the effect he intended.

“Come in here wid ye,” ordered the mistress.

Tatters skipped joyfully across the clay floor and seated himself, cross-legged, in the fire-light.

“Didn’t ait a bit the day,” he said, turning up his blue eyes appealingly to her.

“Augh! musha, God help us!” said the woman; and, getting up, she went to the dresser close by the head of her bed, and producing thence three cold potatoes gave them to the child.

The visitor friend, a younger woman, very slatternly of appearance, meantime surveyed this gift with a curl of contempt on her lip, and, getting up suddenly from her chair, drew her shawl over her head, saying—

“Wait, Tatthers; I’ll run and get ye a bit of bread. Augh! musha, it’s them as has

childer feels for a cratur has no one to look to him. Cold potatoes!"

She disappeared, muttering as she went, and Tatters' patroness came back and sat down by the fire. She was a big old woman, a miser, and therefore, as a matter of course, reputed to be rich. She owned a horse and car and licence, and employed a man as driver. The horse, when at home, occupied the far end of the apartment from the fire ; a goat pastured on the waste ground without ; a half-dozen hens were perched comfortably on a pole that ran parallel with the chimney-piece, about three feet above it, a sociable arrangement, and conducive to prolificness in the matter of egg-laying. Everything was dirty, frowsy, warm, and comfortable.

Tatters, whose quick eyes took in the smallest details, spied under the chair vacated by the visitor a tin can of porter with which the two ladies had been refreshing themselves.

and which was only half emptied. At this he was staring so longingly as to attract the observation of the mistress.

“Ah, but yer the boy!” she cried, half angrily, half admiringly. “Here, then.”

She caught up the can, and taking the lid belonging to it off the chimney-piece, filled it full, and held it to his lips.

Tatters drank greedily, and, to his surprise, received a second lidful.

At this juncture the other woman returned with a large slice of bread and treacle. This she handed to Tatters, with a glance of conscious superiority to her friend. As she sat down she caught sight of the piece of unconsumed roll sticking out of his jacket, and pulled it out indignantly.

“Look at that! An’ ye told us you got nothing all day.”

“’Twas a man at the station ga’ me that there a while ago,” answered he, promptly and

glibly ; “ and I was ‘fraid to ait in the street that they’d fake it on me.”

“ Well done to yourself, Tatters ! ‘tis you is the boy !” cried both dames in chorus. “ An’ tell us where’s Flitters an’ the Counsellor ? And how much coal did yez fake off the quay to-day ?”

“ Nary bit at all—we cudn’t. We were singing down at the ships.”

Then Tatters, feeling that he had got on a dangerous subject, held down his head, and blushed a little.

“ That Flitters bates cock-fighting. Mrs. Carmody, I’ll trouble ye ; I’m dhry.”

She held out her hand for the can, and, having drunk some, filled out a lidful for Tatters.

“ Stop !” cried the lady of the house. “ I ga’m two before.”

She was late, and Tatters winked an eye at her as he drank his share. Then the can was

returned to Mrs. Carmody, who put it out of sight at the back of her chair.

Tatters pretended to eat the potatoes, but he contrived to stuff them unseen into his jacket lining, and went on unconcernedly devouring the bread and treacle. Then he looked round for a creepy stool of his acquaintance, and, spying it in its corner, fetched it to the fire, where he disposed it at such a cunning angle that he could reach the beer-can unseen. This he did, too. While the gossips were talking he contrived to fill and drink two more measures of the porter unsuspected by its owner, but with the full approbation and acquiescence of the visitor, who held her friend's niggardliness in fine scorn.

“Will I ever forget that day I gave her the child to hold while I ran in for wan minute to poor Mary Cassidy’s wake! I was only afther weaning him, and wid crossness and the teeth he was bawlin’ to deafen ye; an’ iv coorse

when I wanted it not a creature was there to hold him for me. Well, I seen Flitters sittin' over beyant in the sun, and I trusted him to her. Faix, you'd think she'd ait him wid delight to get him ; and oh ! vo ! when I kem out again I had nayther him nor her, nor ever seen him till dark night, when the Counsellor carried him home to me. She was afraid to come wid him herself, ye see ; and if he wasn't half dead ! And I got one of them locust beans in his frock that she gave him to ait on purpose to kill him, I think."

"Ah, yer lyin'!" cried Tatters indignantly. "She tuk him down to the Pigeon-house ; and she bought milk and a sugar-stick for him, so she did. 'Twas I giv' him a bit of nice soft locus'."

"*Bought* milk!" echoed the mistress of the house, lost in wonder.

"Ay, *an'* a sugar-stick!" went on the mother. "Yer the nurse, wid yer locuses,

Tatthers! An' what the divil did yez want wid my baby to the Pigeon-house, eh?"

"Flitthers sed she liked them, and no one ever axed her to hould a baby afore," Tatters answered, after an absent pause, and *se mouchant* in an original and primitive fashion. He was thinking of the theatre and his lost sixpence, and felt melancholy and half angry.

Flitters and the Counsellor were enjoying themselves now, seated in the front centre row of that part of the house which in France is called, not inaptly, *le paradis*, criticising the performance, and not unfrequently interpolating and amending the text, fighting with their neighbours, and cheering to the echo the Fenian sentiments of the piece; the big sun-lights in the dome so close that they could feel the heat of them; the caryatides, with their eternal bland smile, supporting the stage boxes; and the renowned old drop-scene, with the fragment of a Greek temple perched on

the top of a hill, a couple of trees with boa-constrictor trunks, crowned with a mushroom for foliage, and two goats in the foreground listening to the youth with the lyre, who is invoking Apollo in vain for at least the last quarter of a century. Tatters remembered it all, and a great sigh heaved itself upward, from beneath the frontless shirt and the tightly-buttoned jacket.

“Nor never will agen ayther,” the owner of the maltreated baby continued. “Oh no, people knows her betther nor that.”

This was true. Ever since the day when Flitters, intoxicated with the delightful novelty of being entrusted to hold a baby, had carried the treasure off for the day, her fame, never the best, had stood at zero in the estimation of the matrons of Commons Lane.

“An’ where are they to-night, eh?”

This question startled Tatters from his meditations, and he answered, without reflection—

“At the theaytre.”

“What! at the play! Do ye mane the horsemanship or the ‘Shaughraun’?”

The mischief was done now, and Tatters vainly repented his blunder. There was no help for it. He answered meekly—

“The ‘Shaughraun.’”

“Laws!” ejaculated both matrons simultaneously. “Tatthers, where did they get the money?”

Tatters was now reflecting how he might best get out of his scrape. If he told them that his partners had got the money while plying their trade, the consequences would be disastrous. Their credit as being poor would be universally shaken; for there is a credit enjoyed by poverty, quite as real and advantageous in its way as that of wealth, and beggars may be heard discrediting each other’s alleged indigence and destitution with more eagerness and zeal than wealthy people will

show in magnifying or diminishing the financial importance of an acquaintance. Besides, it would be unfair to themselves, and, while true in itself, would convey an impression most distinctly false. All these considerations flashed through Tatters' astute little brain, and he replied, without looking up, and with a demure pout of his lips—

“ Found it goin’ over the drawbridge.”

“ An’ why didn’t they take yez wid them ? ”

“ She gave me halves, and I lost it agen.”

“ Lost it again ! ” muttered Mrs. Carmody, with an accent of strong doubt on the words.

“ An’ did yez pay Mrs. Burke the night’s lodgin’ yez owe her ? ”

Tatters did not reply, and his two friends stared at him with eyes at once puzzled and angry.

“ Maybe they’ll have enough to pay her afther they’ve seen the play ! ” observed Mrs.

Carmody, with bitterness and rage in the tones of her voice.

The fact was that she and her gossip were both aggrieved that the *trouwaille* had been suppressed and kept from their knowledge. Had Flitters and the Counsellor been loyal, they would have run immediately to Commons Lane to share their prize with their friends there. Had not they always had the “bit and the sup” equally with their own children? In Mrs. Carmody’s case—equally at least with her own hens and her own pig; for she, being childless, lavished her wealth of affection on these animals, they standing to her in lieu of family. A sum of money—who knew how large?—found and disposed of in secrecy and darkness!—it was the blackest ingratitude and treachery; and, with all the consciousness of being defrauded of her lawful share of it rankling in her breast, she turned to her neighbour, who was to the full as indignant,—

“ Faith, then, people as can lose sixpences or shillins’,” she added pointedly, “ and can go to the ‘ Shaughraun,’ ought to be able to pay their share, an’ not be makin’ a poor mouth to craturs has enough ado keep theirselves.”

“ Yis, bedad, Mrs. Carmody ! ” assented the neighbour woman, who had all the air of regretting her bread and treacle.

Tatters, meantime, with an assumed look of penitence and confusion, drooped his head sideways and sucked one treacly thumb. As his eyes wandered round the apartment, they lighted on a white speck shining amongst straw, and just perceptible to him at the low level at which he was sitting, and from which he could see into a hen’s nest, which, formed of an old tea-chest, in the side of which a hole had been cut for the convenience of those members of Mrs. Carmody’s family who were disposed to such useful pursuits, was placed in a warm corner, not far from the hearth.

Tatters took note of this spoil, and resolved wickedly to secure the egg at any risk. He felt his position growing hotter and hotter every minute, for the two women had been drinking pretty heavily, and there was no telling the moment when open hostilities might not break out; he was longing for deliverance, when a loud noise without startled the whole party. It was Mrs. Carmody's horse and hackney-car coming home, led by the driver, who was intoxicated, and who had broken the shaft of the vehicle by turning the corner of the lane too sharply.

"Oh, laws!" screamed the mistress, the moment she heard the well-known sound. "'Tis Paudheen, and he's drunk, I know, by the foot of him. Run, Mrs. Dowling! maybe he has killed the baste."

Out they flew, frantic, both reaching the narrow door together, and jamming and pushing to get first.

Tatters jumped up with a spring, secured the egg, and fled off in the darkness across the field to another outlet; for a crowd had followed the broken car up the lane, and he had no desire to meet the outraged Mrs. Burke.

He loitered about purposely, without even the heart to beg, so depressed was he by the accumulation of misfortunes that had befallen him, until he heard eleven strike by the town clocks. Then he turned his steps towards Carlisle Bridge, intending to wait at the south side of it until the play was over in Hawkins Street, and he could pick up his friends and warn them to keep away from Commons Lane for that night at least.

The night was warm and mild, and a cool breeze, smelling of the fresh brine yet, though sadly tainted in its passage upward from the bay, swept between the balustrades of the bridge and cooled his hot cheeks. The river ran its seaward course in silence between the

two black walls of the quays, and the ships' lights swayed with a gentle rise and fall, as if moved by a sleeper's breath. The thick network of masts and spars looked like a wintry forest, bleak and eerie, and the great black mass of the Custom-House was not relieved by a single gleam of light.

Tatters squeezed himself close to the parapet, with his face resting sideways on the cold balustrade, and stared out moodily. He was engaged now in considering what aspect he had better put on the case he had to lay before his partners, with a view to escape the beating that awaited him at the Counsellor's hands.

He was so small that his face was barely level with the thick columns of the balustrade, and he could only see the shining surface of the river at some distance below. He was sleepy, too, for the fumes of the porter had got into his head, and he was tired after the long, exciting day.

The passers-by never noticed the weary little figure that shrunk closer to the wall as they approached. The usual nocturnal wanderers came and went. Soldiers, generally the centre of some noisy, brawling group ; artisans with white faces, released from workshops and stifling attics, taking the air before going back to sleep, very likely in the same pestilential dens ; servants out of place, perhaps ignorant country girls turned adrift on the streets by the considerate Christian matrons to whom so many of the fallen classes owe their destruction : all that queer effervescence of a great city that rises to the surface, restless and disturbed when all else is at rest, seethed and murmured, as it passed to and fro.

At last some carriages passed quickly. Cabs and outside cars followed with a noisy rattle that recalled Tatters to the fact that the play must be over, and that he must keep a look-out for his partners. Every moment that passed

added to his fear and depression, and he clutched the egg—an offering of propitiation intended for Flitters—as if his only hope of safety lay in it.

At last the foot-passengers began to appear pouring out of the narrow end of Hawkins Street. On to the quay came the varied contingents, from the denizen of the dress circle, well dressed, with cigar in mouth, to the bare-footed tattered “god.” Among these last, and not the least noisy and argumentative of them all, appeared the Counsellor and Flitters, stepping along quickly to get home to bed, as became such well-to-do orderly citizens. Tatters started forward, and with his head hanging in a manner intended to represent the uttermost depth of woe and dejection, waited their attack.

“Tatters !” cried Flitters, astonished.

“ Why didn’t ye come, eh ?” demanded the Counsellor in a tone of mingled contempt and impatience ; “ eh ?” he repeated, when he saw

Tatters, instead of replying, retreat, his head still hanging, and lay it against the wall.

“ I lost it,” he whimpered dolefully, after a pause.

“ Lost it!” repeated the other two, closing in inquisitively and almost suspiciously around him.

“ Ay !” this with a regular sob. “ ’An they’ll murther yez up in the lane.”

“ Ye informed ?” burst from Flitters ; “ ye tol’ Mrs. Burke we had it. Oh ye——”

The Counsellor stemmed the tide of opprobrium that burst from Flitters’ lips, by darting at Tatters and taking him by the throat.

“ Ye lie !” gasped the victim, “ I didn’t ; lem’me go an’ I’ll tell yez it all.” He resigned himself passively in the Counsellor’s grip, moaning faintly at intervals. The brimless hat had fallen off, and the dusty blond curls were blown back off his forehead by the breeze.

“Go on,” thundered Flitters.

“I let the sixpence fall out ov me hand in the gutter before the Custom House, an’ a big fellow picked it up and run wid it.” Here he introduced a sob which so softened the Counsellor that he relaxed his grasp altogether. “An’ then I went up to Mrs. Carmody to see her, an’ that owld wan, Mrs. Dowlin’, was in it”—another sob.

“An’ ye towld, eh?”

“No ; she ga’ me a lot of porther, an’ the two ov them picked me, an’ they war mad wid us, an’ Paudheen brought in the car broke, an’ the horse all destroyed, an’ I run while they wer’ arguin’.”

And at this juncture Tatters put one hand to his right eye, and opening his mouth to its widest extent, proceeded to cry in earnest.

“Whisht!” said Flitters, not unkindly, “yer a misfortunate gomeral.” Then she took up

the skirt of the princess dress and wiped his face compassionately.

Tatters, as if a sudden recollection flashed upon him, plunged his hand into his breast, and extracting the egg, held it up to her view.

“Where’d ye get that?” said Flitters, who loved eggs, examining the specimen with the critical gaze of a connoisseur, and testing its newness by holding it between her eye and a gas-lamp.

Tatters grinned knowingly. “Faked it out ov Mother Carmody’s nest while she was fitin Paudheen.”

Flitters’ whole attention was concentrated on tapping the narrow end of the egg against the pavement with a view to cracking and loosing the shell preparatory to sucking it; so she made no comment to that statement.

“An’ now,” growled the Counsellor, “where’ ll we go to sleep?”

“Come on up to the hot wall at the back of

Guinness's Brewery," proposed Tatters, whose foresight had already prepared that refuge.

There seemed to be nothing better to do. The Counsellor led the van, much exercised by his boots, one of which had ripped down the inside, so that half his bare foot protruded through. The boot, meantime, turning off sideways, in a manner that gave him, from behind, an odd, duck-footed gait. Tatters, light-hearted once more, trotted after him, while Flitters, sucking out the egg deliberately and luxuriously, as became an epicure with a dainty, brought up the rear.

The next day, after an early visit to the fruit-market, where they so distinguished themselves by their activity in rendering assistance where casualties, such as an upset crate of apples or plums, seemed to warrant its display, that by general consent an expelling party had been formed, and our three friends, in company with a band of compeers, driven forth

ignominiously: Flitters, Tatters, and the Counsellor, with appetites sharpened by their exercises, betook themselves to a dairy in quest of buttermilk for breakfast. Tatters' remaining fourpence provided rolls, this time without butter, and each munching a roll, they presented themselves at the counter of a dirty little dairy-shop, somewhere off Capel Street.

“Pennyworth of buttermilk, if you plase, ma'am ?” Flitters was the spokeswoman, and addressed the woman of the shop in a modest tone, with downcast eyes, and penny ostentatiously outstretched.

“Where's yer jug ?”

“We only wants to drink it for our break-quist, ma'am,” replied Flitters, in an insinuating voice.

The woman took a good look at the trio, and, noticing the Counsellor's eyes wandering over her shop with a hungry look, as if in quest of some small portable article whereof to

make his own, felt inclined to drive the band out with contumely ; but Tatters' mild, appealing blue eyes met hers with a gaze so confiding and engaging that she relented, and calling her daughter from an adjoining apartment to attend to the customers, while she kept watch and guard over the suspected Counsellor and Flitters, whose mock airs of humility and modesty had not imposed on her for an instant, she handed them two wooden "pigs," or long mugs of wood hooped with metal, and directed them to a tub of buttermilk standing in a corner, from which they might help themselves. They had soon finished, and, with many expressions of thanks, were betaking themselves off, when the woman called Tatters, who was trotting after the other two, and presented him with a halfpenny back out of the penny.

"Thank ye, ma'am," replied Tatters, effusively, all the while thinking to himself what a fool she was, for he, as well as the others,

had drunk more buttermilk than felt at all comfortable, especially in conjunction with the unripe baking apples and hard preserving plums of the early morning's festivities.

When he got outside, and showed the coin, with a derisive grin, to his partners, they, who had observed and had felt aggrieved by the dairywoman's suspicion, advised him, ironically, to spit on it and turn it for luck, and, moreover, to make sure it was a good one. Then they all went and lay down in a sunny place until an internal sensation reminded Flitters that it was time to think of dinner, and their lodgings that night. The hot wall was not too bad at a pinch, but it was always excessively crowded, and the company was not too choice. So before long they found themselves in a suitable locality in the Liberties, where Flitters' vocal *répertoire* and general reputation were not too familiar, and they struck up as usual.

Whether the hot weather, or her unwholesome breakfast, affected her, Flitters did not sing so well as usual, and the coppers were few and far between. Bad luck never comes alone ; kicks were far more plentiful than halfpence this day, and by four that afternoon Flitters had sung herself hoarse, had been moved on several times by an unsympathetic policeman, and had gained only three halfpence. She was tired and dispirited, and felt not too well either.

“Come on to the divil out of this, I’m rale sick,” she cried to the Counsellor. “I’ll run up to Mrs. Kelly’s and ax her for a sup of tay ; go down and wait for me on Bloody Bridge.”

Mrs. Kelly was the wife of a drayman, and was very well off. She had been a “comrade girl” of Flitters’ mother long ago. She had a kind feeling for, and now and again did the waif a good turn. Whenever she chose to present herself she was well received ; but

some odd feeling of pride prevented Flitters going often to see her; and it was only when in dire extremity that she troubled Mrs. Kelly's domicile. She never took Tatters or the Counsellor there. They were not to be trusted in a place where loose property was lying about, and Flitters would have been cut in quarters sooner than play any tricks on her friend, who represented somehow her better, her ideal self, to this semi-savage.

She reached the street soon—a street with great old houses, where the Lords and Commons of the Irish Parliament long ago dwelt—houses with curious gnarled iron-work to their railings, and oak wainscoted walls, and stairs of oak, too, could you have spied the grain of the wood beneath the dirt and dust that years of neglect had piled upon them. Angelica Kauffman's delicate hands traced the frescoes, obliterated now by whitewash, on the old ceilings; Brabant and Flanders sent the huge old carved

black oak mantelpieces, chipped, and cracked, and maltreated now, but before which Peg Woffington had, perhaps, warmed her large white hands, and the lovely Gunnings dreamed visions of future coronets in the glowing embers of the fires. If all the shadows those flickering fires had cast could reappear to us once more! Castlereagh's noble head and face, like that of the young Augustus in its classic beauty, with the sad far-seeing eyes, and clear-cut handsome mouth; Grattan; and Flood, with his eager eyes and deep voice; Wolf Tone and Lord Edward—ill-fated Geraldine—in a street hard by he met his death; Lord Kilwarden, and wicked, witty Jonah Barrington. Shadows take up but little space, or there will not be standing room on the floor soon, so many present themselves at the door claiming admittance.

Flitters, standing on the doorstep without—the hall-door has long ago disappeared—is

trying to remember how long it is since she was here before. Not since Fairy House Races. Fairy House is an April saint's day, and this is August. Flitters remembered it well, for she found a purse on the racecourse, the contents of which recompensed her for her walk from Dublin and back. So she ascended the stair with an independent feeling that she was doing no more than she ought in paying a friendly call.

She reached the room soon ; it was a large front room, and found her friend sitting in a chair by the fire, with a tiny baby asleep in her lap. Mrs. Kelly held up her finger warningly, though with a smile of welcome on her lips, when she caught sight of the shock head and wild black eyes at the door.

“Musha, is that yourself, Liza ?” said she in a friendly voice ; “sit down here, avourneen ; where were ye this long time ?”

Flitters made no answer ; she was absorbed

in staring at the baby, a new arrival, comparatively, at least, for another, barely more than a baby, lay asleep in a bed by the wall, and other small creatures were crawling to and fro on the floor.

“ Why weren’t ye here sooner, and I’d have had ye for godmother—eh, Liza ? ” went on the mother, stroking the baby’s cheeks with a long thin finger. She was a sweet-voiced, pleasant-faced woman, very young to have half-a-dozen children, and sadly delicate and worn-looking.

Flitters held down her head and blushed a little. Mrs. Kelly was her godmother, and was the only one who called her by her own name, and Flitters felt in some way or other always a different creature when in her presence. Mrs. Kelly never cursed or drank, and was always quiet and nice. Her husband, the drayman, idolised and never beat her, and, except when he went on a spree—which, alas ! he did now and again—always carried her

home all his week's wages. No wonder, indeed, that Flitters revered her, and went to see her so seldom.

"Ye're not lookin' well, Liza," said Mrs. Kelly after a pause; "will I make a cup of tea for ye?"

Flitters, in a shamefaced way, signified her assent, and seeing that the kettle needed filling seized it, and flew down to the pump in the street for water at once, and when she came back she placed the kettle on the fire, and asked permission to sweep the floor.

"Nonsense! sit down and hold the baby for me," said her friend, and getting up she placed her sleeping burden in Flitters' lap, having first made her sit down in her place. Who could describe the delight and pride of Flitters so honoured and trusted? She scarcely breathed for an instant or two after the little bundle was laid on her knees, and she watched her opportunity, when the baby's mother had

turned her back, to fold back the flannel wrapper off the child's face so that she could look at it. She had only one wish in the world, it was that her enemy, Mrs. Dowling, might see her at this moment. She forgot Tatters and the Counsellor waiting for her on the bridge, and sat and drank tea and talked with her friend. Conversation, indeed, was difficult to Flitters, for, as may be imagined, they had but few subjects in common. Mrs. Kelly was a Meath woman, and knew little of town or town ways, while not a sooty sparrow, that views life from the roofs and eaves, is less unsophisticated than Flitters.

“ Ye never went to school at all since, I suppose, Liza ?”

Liza made a grimace, and answered no by her silence. Even ground-down Ireland has that fragment of her ancient liberties left her intact, nobody need go to school if he does not like it—a privilege of which Flitters had

availed herself so largely that she barely knew her letters. The Counsellor could read, and repeated to her, line by line, the words of her new songs till she knew them by heart. Flitters vainly endeavoured to make him teach her how to read. The Counsellor chose to brook no rival near his throne, and stubbornly refused to impart his craft.

Mrs. Kelly bent her soft, sweet eyes anxiously on Flitters' face for a few seconds, then she said, tentatively :

“ There’s a night school up here, near Adam and Eve’s Chapel, for them that’s engaged during the day. Wouldn’t you go ? I know the ladies that teach in it, an’ they are very nice. Eh, Liza ? ”

But Flitters made no answer still, and fidgeted in her chair ; she pretended then to recollect something, and jumped up.

“ You’re not going. Sit down again,” pressed her hostess kindly. But Flitters was

at the door now, and stood shifting uneasily from one foot to the other.

“ I mus’ go, Mrs. Kelly, they’ll be waiting for me.”

“ Well, come back now some day soon, and maybe I’d get you to mind the children for me, and let me go down to Kingstown to see my sister Mary that’s at service there. Eh, would you, Liza ? ”

Flitters reddened with pride and pleasure at the idea, and showed her great white teeth with a grin of delight.

“ Yis,” she answered in an intense tone. Then, unable longer to restrain herself, she ducked her head by way of parting salutation, and was down the stairs and out in the street like a flash. She started at a quick trot to rejoin her partners ; but before she had gone far the idea of the honour that had just been paid her took such vivid possession of her that she felt constrained to sit down on a door-

step and hug her knees with delight. A girl with a little child, which she held by the hand, toddling beside her, bid her move and make room for her to pass. Flitters cursed at her scornfully, and refused to stir. She felt as good as her, every bit. The girl, who was coming out of her own doorway, was ill-advised enough to give the intruder a push by way of assisting her own authority and consequence, for which she was repaid by a poke from Flitters' bony elbow that made her ribs ache. She hailed a boy standing near, calling on him to revenge her, but Flitters was half-way down the street by this, getting over the ground with a quick sliding step, at a wonderful rate.

She drew up and stopped on seeing a sudden rush of people down a side lane. Following them with her eyes, she saw two men, who had just come out of a low groggeries in the lane, rolling over each other in the mud, clutching and struggling for the upperhand.

A fight clearly : Flitters forgot all the world beside, flew down the lane, and in a few minutes reached the ring that was rapidly forming round the combatants.

Two great draymen, one half drunk and encumbered with his frieze coat ; the other, in his shirt sleeves, wholly drunk and in a fury of rage. They staggered to their feet, striking and kicking like wild horses. Flitters was staring open-mouthed at the man in the big coat. She knew him, but she was so dazed with excitement that for an instant her recollection was puzzled—Hugh Kelly. The name flashed before her in an instant—her friend's husband ; and the next moment, Flitters, seeing he was at a disadvantage in the fight, had thrown herself headlong between the combatants. Which of them struck her, or how it was, she alone knew ; but the next moment the two men were dragged apart by the horrified bystanders, and she fell senseless, her

head crashing against the granite step of the door.

Tatters and the Counsellor meantime had grown impatient, and had left the rendezvous to wander up and down in search of their partner. They knew the street, but not the house, and as the pair, angry and discontented, turned into it, they beheld in the centre of a crowd, a stretcher borne by four policemen, and on it lying Flitters, quiet and silent as a stone.

Tatters fell back against the wall and gasped with terror, grief, and rage. What had happened ? Was she hurt or had she “done anything ” ? To do anything that could bring them within the pale of the law meant five years in a reformatory. Magistrates are only too glad to clear the streets of such creatures, knowing that, however costly the reformatory system may be, it is a saving in the long run. But the recipients of the bounty are rarely in accord with this opinion ; and if Flitters

was to be “quodded” for that period, it meant starvation to Tatters at least. The Counsellor might be able to make out a living for himself, but Tatters would inevitably be reduced to breaking a lamp or demanding alms of a poor-law guardian, either a preparatory step to following his friend.

The Counsellor meantime uttered a wide-mouthed howl, and flinging himself into the throng, proclaimed himself her brother, and demanded at large the history of the calamity. From twenty voices he heard twenty stories, each widely differing from the others. This much at least he knew, she was being carried to the hospital; and the two draymen who had “killed” her were in custody.

He rushed back to Tatters, whom he found now the centre of a group of sympathising women, who were bidding him not to cry, and trying to obtain his address from him. Tatters, in all his grief, did not for an instant

lose his self-possession, or forget his mendacity, and was in the middle of a pathetic family history when the Counsellor arrived.

“Who hot her?” he sobbed.

“ ‘Twas Hugh Kelly: no, ‘twas Slattery,” replied another; “but when she comes to she’ll ‘dentify him, if so be she’s raelly kilt. Don’ ye remember when Bill Casey got six months for murderin’ his mother-in-law wid the poker; he an’ his brother was in it, an’ they were both had up to hospital for the old wan to choose which done it. She’ll have to ‘dentify Kelly whenever she comes to.”

The Counsellor listened so far, his sharp ears selecting all the salient points out of the babel, for everybody had rushed out into the street to enjoy the excitement. Then he seized Tatters, and started with him in pursuit of the *cortège*.

They followed it to the hospital, and waited until nearly seven o’clock to hear the report of

the doctors. Having declared themselves her brothers, they had been admitted to the waiting-room, a cheerless apartment, where every second ticked on a huge clock, seemed an eternity to poor hungry Tatters.

At last the door opened and a Sister of Mercy made her appearance. She surveyed the two children with a keen scrutinising look, not unkind, but with that part careless, part interested, part benevolent expression, which people like her, accustomed to the contemplation of misery and pain, come in time to have. All doctors have this look, and skilled nurses of the educated order get it too.

“ Well, children,” she said in a friendly tone, sitting down and scanning their two faces: “ and are you this poor girl’s brothers?”

“ Yes, ma’am,” answered both simultaneously, their eyes eagerly fixed on hers. The Counsellor had taken off his hat when she came in, and had pulled his duty locks re-

spectfully. Tatters had not observed this action, and he now slipped a little behind the Counsellor and took off his brimless head-piece too.

“I am sorry to have to tell you it is a very bad case: no hope, or almost no hope; internal injury from the blow; and she may be unconscious for forty-eight or more hours.”

The Counsellor’s face took a grim, hard look.

“Won’t she ‘dentify Hugh Kelly or Slattery? ’twas them hot her.”

“Yes,” replied the nun, noting with a sigh the expression of his countenance. She then turned away from him to the other child, who had not understood, save by the tone of her voice, the import of what she had said as to Flitters’ condition.

Tatters was standing—a perfect embodiment of woe—with his face puckered ready for a sob; one hand up to his eye, and one foot curled sympathetically over the ankle of

the other. A late sunbeam, coming in the window, played among the fair dusty curls of his pretty head, and only for the droll incongruous rags of clothes he might have passed for a forlorn, dissipated Cupid. The nun stretched out a hand—a large, shapely white hand, with a silver ring on its third finger, and drew the child as near to her spotless wimple as she dared.

“Tell me now,” she said, “has she made her first confession yet?”

Tatters looked up at her with eyes full of despair. “Will she die, ma’am?” he asked.

This question, by way of answer, was quite enough for the nun, and after a pause she replied gravely, “I am afraid so; in fact, I am sure of it.”

This was worse than the reformatory—worse than he had ever imagined; and Tatters let himself fall sitting on the floor, and, between affection and hunger, wailed aloud.

“ Oh ! now, my poor child ! don’t cry so, now don’t,” said the nun, trying to soothe him. She was well used to these scenes ; and tender and gentle as her voice sounded, the ring was that of the kindness of experience rather than that of sympathy. The form remained, though, by constant habit, the force behind was somewhat spent. “ Can *you* tell me ?” she said to the Counsellor ; “ you have no father or mother, I believe ? did she ever make her confession ? Where do you go to Mass ?”

The Counsellor only frowned, and made a gesture with the billycock hat, as if he were about to insert his head in it and be off.

“ Do you ever go to Mass ?” She turned again to the sitting figure beside her.

“ No, never,” gasped Tatters, reckless and truthful for once.

“ And where do you live, my children ?”

“ Nowhere,” returned the Counsellor sullenly, while Tatters muttered, “ Don’ know.”

The Counsellor wasted no time in sentimental regrets. He was solely occupied by plans of vengeance, and, full of bitterness and rage, was vowing to get one or other of the criminals five years of penal servitude at least, or "earn his own hanging on him;" it did not matter which. He glared viciously at the nun, and set his teeth to keep in the curses he was fulminating to himself.

"*Is she your sister?*" asked the nun, who was puzzled by the boy's bearing.

"Ay! will we be let to see her, ma'am?" replied the Counsellor, choking down his fury and trying to speak respectfully.

"I certainly will let you see her, but not, of course, until she recovers her senses, and the police and the prisoners have been with her."

"Let me see," she added, consulting a memorandum; "call here to-morrow; she may come to before the time named; be here at two."

“Now, reverend mother,” said a lay sister, opening the door and putting in her head.

“Yes, sister!” said the reverend mother, rising. “Stay,” she said, turning to the disconsolate Tatters, who had risen from his sitting posture, and with his head leaning on the back rail of the chair, was weeping silently.

“Are you hungry?”

“Ay!” replied Tatters, with a fresh sob at the word.

The Counsellor answered nothing. He had forgotten his hunger in his thirst for vengeance, and was longing only to get out of the house.

“Take them and give them some soup, Sister Monica. Don’t go away, children, until I come back.”

The lay sister took the arabs out of the waiting-room. No sooner were they in the passage than the Counsellor, spying the side-door open by which they had come in, darted

through it, and was gone like a bird from a cage.

“ Oh !” cried the lay sister, astonished.

“ He had to go ; he cudn’t wait,” explained Tatters apologetically.

When the reverend mother came back she found Tatters sitting meekly on the end of a long form, an empty bowl beside him. It was the lay sisters’ recreation hour, and the cook, who was knitting a stocking, with the progress of which the capers of a kitten, which was lying in her lap, sadly interfered, was seated near talking to him. Tatters slid down from the form at the approach of his patroness, and perched respectfully on one foot. The reverend mother, who, like the cook, had taken a fancy to his pretty face, smiled pleasantly at him.

“ Well, my child, you have had something, I hope ; and now, tell me, will you go to Mass next Sunday ?”

“But I don’t know how to read,” was the prompt reply.

“But, in any case, you could say the Rosary, and would you not like to learn how to read?”

Tatters hung down his head.

“Tell me, now, will you promise to be a good boy, and come and see me here again soon?”

“—Oh, yis, ma’am.”

“Well, you shall have a piece of bread and jam now, and, Monica, I shall be back directly.”

Monica took bread and jam from a neighbouring cupboard; and while her young friend was disposing of this, the reverend mother searched out a suit of clothes which had belonged to a small nephew of her own, and which were just the size to fit Tatters, whose sad needs in that department were only too plainly visible.

“What do you say to giving him a bath,

sister?" The lay sister was carrying away Tatters and the new suit to induct him into it.

"A bath! reverend mother," she re-echoed in astonishment. "Why, he might take his death of cold."

This, to say the least of it, was highly probable; for Tatters, save when he chose in hot weather to bathe in the sea, had, most assuredly, not been thoroughly washed since he was a baby.

He soon returned, radiant with delight, dressed in a smart braided suit of knicker-bockers. The old clothes were rolled in a bundle, and given to him to take away, at his own request, a request willingly granted, for they were by no means things to keep in a cleanly, well-ordered establishment like this.

"Now, my child," said the reverend mother, "be here to-morrow about two, and I hope there may be better news of your poor sister for you."

“Thank you, ma’am,” said Tatters gravely, pulling one of his curls in imitation of the Counsellor, as the lay sister led him to the door.

Once outside, he ran as fast as his legs would carry him, until he reached a deserted back lane close to the walls of the great hospital he had just left. To strip off the new suit and don the old rags again was the work of a minute. Then he proceeded to the nearest pawnshop, and pawned the Mother Superior’s gift for tenpence, with which sum clenched tight in his hand he set out in search of the Counsellor to give him his supper.

Two o’clock was the hour at which the poor senseless body was to recover its understanding and human intelligence. Long before even midday, Tatters and the Counsellor might have been seen skulking about the precincts of the hospital. They saw a pale, sickly woman, with a tiny infant in her arms, go up

the huge granite steps of the door, and beg, in vain, for admittance. After a short interview with the portress sister she crept away again, sobbing despairingly.

Perhaps it was as well for Hugh Kelly's wife that the Counsellor did not guess her bootless errand.

It was a beautiful day. A hot sun beat on the roofs, the granite steps of the great portico glistened with a dazzling sheen, and the huge plate-glass windows were wide open, like so many mouths gasping for air.

Tatters and the Counsellor went down a back lane—the same where the former had changed his toilet the preceding day, and lay down to pass the anxious hours as best they could.

The Counsellor's expedition in search of evidence had been absolutely useless. No one had seen the blow. Some were positive it was Slattery; others, equally positive, it

was Hugh Kelly's foot that had given the fatal kick. His only hope rested now in the chance of Flitters being able to identify the criminal. He lay quite still, biting his fingers, and fidgeting with impatience for the hour of admittance to chime on the steeple clock near by. Tatters was quieter; he had made up his mind for the worst, and lay still in the sun-heat, mechanically tracing figures in the soft white dust of the path, or plucking idly at the blades of grass that struggled for a dusty existence in the stone-bordering beside him.

One o'clock struck; but the Counsellor was so busy counting the chimes that preceded the hour-stroke that he did not see a cab roll by, with a policeman seated on the box, and two more inside in company with two big rough-coated men. An outside car followed, with some men in plain clothes seated on it.

They all passed up the great, white, hot steps, and through the door into a wide long hall, so cool, so clean, and fragrant of flowers, that it felt like heaven itself after the sweltering heat and dust without. They stood still, waiting for orders. The prisoners, stunned and soddened-looking, hardly raised their eyes from the tessellated floor. At last, a timid, pretty nun appeared, and, drooping her eyes, murmured something to one of the men in plain clothes, at which the whole troop set themselves in motion, and followed her up a great carved oak staircase, through fresh wide halls with deep windows full of cool green ferns, into a ward where, on one white bed among many others, some tenanted, some empty, lay Flitters, her dark eyes half closed, and her wild hair streaming back on the snowy pillow.

The sun-stained face had been sponged with vinegar and water, and looked strangely

colourless and pinched. The dark violet circles round the eyes and mouth were most significant of all. The reverend mother stood, with a grave, anxious face, at the head of the bed ; and, as the men in plain clothes prepared their writing materials, the beads of her great rosary slipped through her fingers one by one.

She knew well what the identification meant—starvation and ruin to the man's wife and little children.

Flitters, dying, half dead as she was, knew this too. She could see the figures going and coming against the white painted wall before her: she could hear, drowsily, the sounds of life and stir without in the air that streamed through the open casements, and now and again black spots, like flies, passed before her eyes. She knew Hugh Kelly had struck her, and that he was there waiting for her to say so, in order to be marched back to prison till the assizes came

on ; and his wife, her friend, and the tiny baby that had lain in her lap the day before, were to starve. Flitters curled her lip at the idea.

Then Slattery, a big black-headed, burly man, was made to stand up before the bed, with his hat on as he had it when the offence was committed. The usual questions were put. Flitters answered clearly, "No, that was not the man." With a sigh of relief, and a look of thankfulness, he moved to one side, and Hugh Kelly, with every trace of colour faded from his red face, and with lips that trembled, though he bit them, tried to make his eyes meet the great burning light of Flitters', as she stared resolutely at him.

"No!" she said, in an emphatic, though broken tone, "that's not him either."

Every one started, and, most of all, Hugh Kelly himself. Flitters repeated, in a fainter voice, what she had said. Positively sure,

on her oath, and all the rest of it. She knew she was dying, and didn't care ; he never laid a finger on her.

Then she broke down, and could say no more. Her eyes closed, and she seemed to fall back into the stupor from which she had been just roused. Further questioning was declared to be as impossible as it was useless, and, baffled and wondering, the ministers of justice withdrew.

They gave her some restoratives, and after a while she sank into a restless stupor.

As soon as two chimed the impatient Counsellor jumped up, and, taking Tatters by the hand, presented himself at the door. They were put into the waiting-room ; after an hour's impatient detention there, the door opened and admitted the reverend mother. She cast a horrified glance at Tatters.

“ Child !” she demanded in astonishment, “ where are the clothes I gave you last night ?”

"I have them put up for Sunday, ma'am," was the pat response. Seeing incredulity painted in her face, Tatters, the *impayable*, dived into some mysterious inner receptacle, and produced thence a tiny slip of yellow paper. "Yis, be me sowl," he declared solemnly; "av you don't believe me, there's the ticket, ma'am."

The reverend mother looked into his face for one instant. Then, with an odd, constrained smile, she rose, and desired them to follow her.

She led the way through the vast painted halls, up the carved staircase, past niches whence great white statues held out hands that expressed pity or benediction; windows filled with cool green ferns, or bright, sweet-smelling flowers, through the open sashes of which currents of warm balmy air came pouring in. They stepped on soft, thick matting, or polished slippery oak. Every-

thing seemed large and magnificent to their unaccustomed eyes, and the Mother Superior's black trailing cloak gave her the proportions of a goddess.

At last they reached Flitters' bedside ; two nuns were beside her, and held up the pillow which the child's head rested on, that she might breathe more easily, for she was gasping pitifully now. Her eyes rested a moment on the faces of her partners, and she signed Tatters to draw nearer to her. He obeyed, passing up the side of the bed opposite to that where the two sisters were. He was crying, and laid his grubby little hand on hers.

The Counsellor pushed rapidly behind him.

“ Flitters,” he said, “ did ye 'dentify Hugh Kelly, eh ?”

Flitters did not reply ; she was looking beseechingly at the reverend mother ; she, wondering and compassionating, took the place of the other nuns, who moved away

down to the foot-rail of the bed, and bent her handsome, kind face over the child's dying form.

Flitters held out her hand, holding that of Tatters in it, and looked again from him to the Mother Superior's face.

She now understood, and, with tears in her eyes, took the dirty little paw from Flitters.

"Don't fear, my poor child, I will take care of him, and God, who cares for the desolate——"

Flitters' face seemed to lighten for an instant, somehow, and she turned her deep eyes to the Counsellor.

"D'ye hear me?" he repeated; "did ye 'dentify him—Hugh Kelly, ye know?"

He spoke in a loud, quick voice, for he saw that all light and understanding was fast fading from her face.

She heard him, though. The great eyes opened wide once more, and met the Coun-

sellor's with all the old light and fire glowing in their depths. With a supreme effort she caught back, as it were, one fleeting breath.

“Ye lie,” she gasped, “he nev—er laid a finger—”

The word died upon her lips; and, as it did, the fierce, defiant look faded from her face into a gentle smile, that remained there when the nun's white hands had closed the eyes for ever.

THE GAME HEN



THE GAME HEN.

“I’d mind meself, Mrs. Dowling, av I wor you,” the carman, Paudheen, said, pulling up on his way to work one morning. “She’ll arn her hanging on ye, so she will. I seen her meself last night, an’ it two o’clock, as I was comin’ home. There she was, sittin’ on the stone, an’ the mune shinin’ on her, an’ she wid her head in her two han’s cryin’. Ay! and she suddenly closes them that a way, an’ shook them over at your house.”

The carman illustrated his words by clasping his hands together and stretching them out.

Mrs. Dowling raised her face, which was scratched and bruised, and, looking at him,

thought to herself that the gesture was more that of prayer than of fighting.

“Ye wor always a disturber, Paudheen,” she made answer coldly. “Let the woman be.”

“Well, mind now, I warned ye,” he retorted, driving off.

It was about ten o’clock of a Dublin spring morning, clear, and fine, and warm; Mrs. Dowling’s husband, the gasfitter, had gone to work some hours before, and her brood of children were running about her house—that is, the two clay-floored rooms which formed her cabin in Commons Lane.

Her side of the lane was still in shadow, and the dark background of the open door in front of which she was crouched formed a framing for her figure, which was quaint enough.

She was a good-looking young woman of about twenty-seven years of age, with fine dark eyes and black hair, some of which hung down her back, some more over her shoulder, and

the rest was rolled in a loose twist on the nape of her neck. Her face was scratched and bruised, and one eye was surrounded by a bluish discolouration; her attire consisted of a bedgown, a tattered black skirt, and a Paisley shawl that age had mellowed to a rusty red brown. She held a baby in her arms.

As she sat taking the air on her own door-stone, her eyes were fixed moodily on a cabin somewhat farther down the lane on the other side; she turned her baby upside down in her lap, and, raising both her arms in a manner that sadly disarranged the Paisley shawl, collected the stray hair from her back and shoulder, and, with the aid of some hairpins, which she produced in the most natural manner possible from her mouth, fastened it in a ball on the back of her head. This done she readjusted the baby and her shawl, and once more turned her eyes on the door of the other cabin. Presently an unseen hand opened this

door a little and shook it. At the first movement she jumped to her feet with a start and made as if to retreat into her own domicile. The door on the other side of the lane opened by degrees, and with difficulty, for it was hanging by one hinge only, and a child, a boy about eight years old, came out. He looked round him, yawned, and shifted uneasily a bundle he was holding in his arms.

An eager, anxious light appeared in Mrs. Dowling's eyes directly they caught sight of the bundle ; she fidgeted and stared until she attracted his attention, then she beckoned him over.

“What a way is that ye have her, Petie, ye natural—where's her head at all ?” She was fumbling at his bundle as she spoke, and ended by taking it from him altogether. “There now, yer arm under her neck, do ye mind ?” As she said this she replaced the bundle, which was alive, in his arms.

He was an odd-looking child naturally, and the fact of his being neither ragged nor dirty made him, in Commons Lane, a still more singular and remarkable figure. He was short for his age and very fragile-looking ; the thick hair that clustered round his face was dark-red in colour, and he had that opaque white skin that seems to go with red hair, and which nature, ever just, bestows with it, probably in compensation. The red eyebrows and eyelashes shaded a pair of large, prettily-shaped eyes of a curious turquoise blue, that was more Saxon than Celtic in its unmixed palleness of tint. There was something odd about those eyes, which seemed to stamp, in a way quite their own, the character of the whole physiognomy. Now and again, if any one took the trouble to watch the child's face, a curious flicker passed over it, beginning with the eyes, which winked once or twice, then dilated and remained fixed, with a weird,

strange, empty look that every other feature of the countenance presently caught up and repeated in its own way. The mouth, which was large, though well formed, opened and drooped, the jaw fell, and the normal expression, a mixture of impotent shrewdness and plaintive disingenuousness, faded clean out and gave place to something that was not quite pain, for it was silent, and the face was a child's; nor quite terror, for it was too short-lived; and yet was both at once.

“Is yer mother out?” asked Mrs. Dowling in a low, meaning voice, fixing her dark eyes on his with a questioning look.

“Out,” echoed the child, with a strange-sounding voice. “Ay.”

“She’s workin’, eh?” hazarded Mrs. Dowling, after a long pause, which she occupied in staring at him and his charge.

But before he could answer, a new-comer appeared on the scene. This was a tall, ugly

old woman of most forbidding aspect, who was walking down the lane in their direction. Petie cast a dazed sort of look at her. Half-witted as he was sometimes, he was still a child, and had the instinct which is the privilege of childhood. He clasped his bundle tighter in his arms and fled at once.

The old woman's face grew blacker and more forbidding as she watched his retreating figure. She looked from him to Mrs. Dowling, with a bitter sneer. "Ha!" she snarled, "that's the way with you, is it?" Then, affecting to see the condition of her friend's face for the first time, she changed her tone to one of mock condolence and sympathy: "Oh, glory! woman dear, but the Game Hen has left yer face a show to-day."

So speaking, and regardless of the unwelcoming scowl on Mrs. Dowling's candid brow, she stooped, and laying one hand on the step on which the latter was seated, established

herself by degrees in a sitting posture beside her friend.

“ Well ! well ! ta be sure,” she began, in the tone of one taking up again the thread of a broken narrative, “ ta think how things comes out in this world. ’Twas God done it, so it was ! That that one cud dissave us all this length of time, to go and say her husband’s a sailor, an’ him servin’ seven year for killin’ a polisman—not bud ’twas good enough for them, dirty carrion ; ’ud take their own mother. I misdoubted her from the first. She was too quiet and too stand-off for me. Ay ! an’ ye may be talkin’, but that wan below there, Maude—ugh, Peggy, I mane (their cursed grandeur ! God, I ax your pardon)—knows her an’ all about her, if either of them ’ud only spake an’ say it.”

“ Faith, then, they’re neither of them bound to do that ; an’ why would they ? No one need tell on themselves,” observed Mrs. Dowling,

snubbingly ; “ an’ for that matter, Peggy never saw her to know her, I don’t believe.”

“ “Tis just their depth and hiddenness,” continued Mrs. Carmody, more acrimoniously for the interruption ; “ depend you upon it, they know wan other. Three months she’s here, the Game Hen. Faith, poor Mrs. Maguire, ‘tis little she expects who she has her house let to. The husban’ is over four years up now ; why how will she face to meet——”

“ She’s out working to-day,” Mrs. Dowling, to whom her friend’s discourse presented no novelty, interrupted in a reflective, melancholy tone, “ an’ that crature is left wid Petie.”

“ Matter ! Petie, indeed, I’m sure he’s good enough for the likes of it.”

“ Augh, musha ! Mrs. Carmody,” returned Mrs. Dowling, with bitterness, “ God help us all, that sees everything—’tisn’t the poor child’s fault.”

“ Father MacQuaide took the two twins

from her the moment he h'ard she was gone to the Maternity Hospital, and putt them up immediately, wan in Inchicore, and wan in William Street. Ay, faith ! luck at that, and luck at her when she kem here ; sure she was that ginteel she wudn't as much as go down the street for a kittle ov wather, 'ithout her bonnet on her. Ay, an' what's more, though 'tis goin' on to four years ago, there's people does be sayin' still she had as much ado with killin' the polisman as the husban' had. The little Game Hen, 'twas so they called her in Lucan ; an' game she is, too—the impedance of her."

" I don't blame her wan bit for that," said Mrs. Dowling, " av he wint to take her husband. I'd do it meself; wouldn't I, me own little old hen ?" she demanded of her baby, giving it a violent kiss.

" Oh no," agreed Mrs. Carmody, magnanimously, " nayther do I; for them polis is cursed

interferers. Oh no," she continued, her countenance assuming a grimly virtuous air, "no wan 'ud fault her for that."

"Augh, then!" cut short the younger woman, "there's people as talks that oughtn't."

With this oracular speech, pronounced in the most aggressive tone, she bounced up and into her house, leaving Mrs. Carmody by herself on the doorstone.

It is probable that of all the residents in the lane the speaker was the only one who would have dared to employ even this much of innuendo to the important Mrs. Carmody. The young woman, however, was of a notoriously independent temper, and had the credit of being extremely outspoken. Strange to say, she was the only one for whom Mrs. Carmody felt the slightest friendliness, or to whom she showed the least goodwill. She bullied and despised the others, and they hated her in return, and vilified her in every way. It was

an allusion to some special vilification that gave point to the above speech of Mrs. Dowling's. It was purely the outcome of spiteful malignity ; but the old woman's name, and her driver, Paudheen's, had long been coupled together in the lane.

There were other reasons as well which conducted to Mrs. Dowling's attitude. Mrs. Carmody, in addition to a horse and car, owned two cabins in the lane—a piece of property from which she derived an immense *prestige*. These were both let, as she preferred the sensation of being landlord to other people. The other houses, her own dwelling-place among them, belonged to a Mrs. Maguire, who was a great crony of hers, and who entrusted her sometimes with the task of collecting her rents. Mrs. Dowling was a tenant of this Mrs. Maguire, and thus in no way dependent on Mrs. Carmody, who was feared and hated by nearly every one of the other residents. Her rapacity

and miserliness, with her tyranny over her own tenants, joined to her habit of watching and reporting the doings of Mrs. Maguire's to that lady, caused her to be eternally in bad odour.

Mrs. Dowling, thanks to her husband—a most industrious gasfitter—was in a position to defy her ill-will. Her rent was always ready, and she gave neither landlord nor agent “any thanks,” as she expressed it, which was her way of saying that she gave both a great deal of impudence. This, however, was tolerated from her, because, as the wife of a tradesman, she took high social rank in Commons Lane. The question of precedence being perpetually a moot point between her and Mrs. Carmody, was at once a bond of union and a source of dispute; a bond of union because, like their betters elsewhere, they found it politic to unite and support each other's claims against the democratic rabble of mere drivers, day-labourers, fruit-hawkers, and plebeians of

the kind of whom the other residents in the lane were composed ; and a source of dispute and jealousy between themselves in their moments of convivial intercourse.

Three months before, as Mrs. Carmody had said, the mother of Petie and the baby of which he was now the sole, and in Mrs. Dowling's eyes, incompetent guardian, had come to live in the lane. She arrived one evening carrying the baby and a basket, and finding a cabin to let, paid the custodian a week's rent in advance, and receiving the key in receipt thereof installed herself without further ado ; no one knew her or anything about her. She was a small woman, lean and nervous-looking ; her shoulders were, perhaps, a little broad for her height ; but her classically-shaped head, with its frizzled crop of dark hair, was well set on a round, straight neck. Her face had been pretty once, and would have been pretty still could the fierce haggard look but have been coaxed

out of it. The eyes were violet, and their thick dark lashes curled upward ; but they had the wild hunted look of a creature that is at bay with all the world. The irregular nose was not without its charm, and the sullen mouth hid a set of small white even teeth, from which one, a front one, was missing. She was cleanly to the last degree in her person and habits, active and hardworking ; very quiet, not to say depressed in manner, did not seek to make friends, and lived to herself ; that is to say, she tried to ; but reserve and seclusion are luxuries hardly attainable in a community like Commons Lane, where life is conducted mainly out of doors, and everything seems in a way public property.

Mrs. Dowling, on seeing that the new-comer was burdened with a young baby, came forward and offered to relieve her of it, while she made some preparation for passing the night. She could not well refuse, and then came the

inevitable questions : Her husband ? Yes ; he was a sailor, gone on a long voyage ; she did not know when he would be home. She had to work for her living ; he made her no allowance. Such were the answers, confused and hurried of delivery, that she made to the inquiries put to her by this friendly gossip. She was as reticent as possible ; nevertheless, Mrs. Dowling contrived to extract an outline of history from her, which sounded plausible enough when retailed with what colouring she chose to add to it. One thing gave rise to suspicion ; she refused to divulge her last place of residence, or even to say where she had been born, brought up, or married. Her people were not content with her ; they would not care to have any one know anything about them ; such were the excuses she invented to put them off with.

Mrs. Dowling was baffled and by no means contented. However, she was forced to relin-

quish her investigations, which, to do her justice, were prompted far more for the loved sake of conversational matter than by any malevolent or self-interested motive. She was thoroughly respectable herself, and after a few days, on seeing the industrious, hard life led by Mrs. Walsh, was inclined to waive all doubt or suspicion that might have been evoked by the reserve with which her inquiries had been met. She felt the more willing to do this because the new-comer entered into a bargain with her to nurse and take care of her baby while she was absent at her work.

Things had gone on thus for about two months, until, one April evening, Mrs. Walsh, on her return from her day's task, was in the act of taking over her baby from its foster-mother; they were standing before the cabin door, when a girl came down the lane from the field. As she walked past, Mrs. Dowling gave her a cold glance, and turned her head aside,

with a movement that would have expressed scorn had it not been too indolent. Mrs. Walsh, who was standing in such a way as to face the girl, started suddenly in such a violent manner that she nearly let the child fall.

“My God!” she gasped, catching her breath, and springing round suddenly to look again. The girl had not seemed to notice anything but Mrs. Dowling’s gesture, and with a bent head walked on quickly as if in haste to get out of sight.

“Mrs. Walsh, d’ye know her; d’ye know Peggy, eh? You do!—tell us; ah, tell us now!”

This entreaty came from Mrs. Carmody, who had been standing within the doorway of a cottage near, and who having seen the start and look of recognition, rushed out at once greedy for its explanation.

Mrs. Walsh seemed if possible more frightened at those questions than she had been by the girl’s appearance. She turned away

abruptly towards her own door, trembling from head to foot, her colour coming and going at every word. "No; only she reminds me—I don't know her. I never saw her before."

She barely waited to finish her answer, and heedless of their entreaties, beat a hasty retreat into her cabin. She shut the door and leaned her back against it, partly because her agitation was so great that she had not the strength to walk further, and partly also with an instinctive feeling that she must keep out these women with their questions, lest she betray herself irreparably.

Mary Kennedy, it was none other. Mary Kennedy herself! the unfortunate whom she had heard spoken of as Peggy. Good God! could it be true; William Kennedy's sister here! It was useless to try to hide herself. Here she thought she might have been safe; it was the far side of Dublin from where the country

people resorted, far from every place where they might chance to see her ; all trace of her seemed lost, and yet the sister of the only man who——. She looked wildly round her as if her own thoughts were a source of additional terror. Trembling all over still, she managed to reach a chair, and sat down to think what one had best do. To get off away to the other end of the city, anywhere to hide ; it seemed like Fate itself pursuing her that *his* sister should appear before her in this place.

She spent more than an hour in a fever of despair ; at last, not until she was worn out and exhausted, the thought suddenly occurred to her that Mary Kennedy had scarcely ever seen her ; and now that she was so much altered by trouble and misfortune, there was a good chance that the girl would not know her again. She grasped at this probability like a drowning creature at the rescuing rope. She recalled in her own mind the times gone by,

when and where she had seen Mary Kennedy, and with a sense of huge relief she came at last to the conclusion that she was safe from recognition. There was even, she told herself, growing bolder with the sensation of safety, the chance that Mary Kennedy would not own to having seen her before, should it happen that she did recollect her. She need not think of that even, and she fell asleep with the feeling of a condemned prisoner who has been reprieved.

On the following evening, for she rose too early for it to be possible for Mrs. Carmody or Mrs. Dowling to encounter her—late rising being one of the appanages of their social rank ; she was self-possessed, and ready with her answers. She had made a mistake ; the girl's face was so like some one she knew ; never saw her before in her life.

“ Ye know she's wan o' them charackters lives in the big old house in the corner, an' a

shame an' disgrace to the place it is." This was from Mrs. Carmody, a very dragon of censoriousness, and who was only half satisfied with Mrs. Walsh's disclaimer.

A curious feeling seized Honor Walsh, and kept her silent for one moment; an uneasy, sore pain filled her heart. Like a vision then passed before her mind's eye the bright, handsome young girl she had seen in the harvest-field a little more than two years ago; and then the pale, shamefaced creature of the previous night, who stole past them like some guilty thing in the dusk, seemed to ask for her pity and sympathy. Who was she, to cast a stone at her? If they only knew! Then the fierce, cruel instinct of self-preservation asserted itself; and catching at her breath, she said, in a hard, forced voice: "Ay, ay, is it, ma'am!"

She must take one side or other; there was no help for it; and from that day a bitter, terrible hatred grew up within her towards

the girl Peggy. She came in time to hold her, as it were, responsible for all her own misfortunes and misery, and she revenged herself for them in her own mind by entertaining, with a savage pleasure, the thought of the degradation and wretchedness that had come upon herself, being thus brought home keenly and directly to her betrayer. She was safe, sheltered, and forgotten ; her story was unknown : but here was his disgrace flaunted in the eyes of the world. Peggy was expiating her brother's crime ; in all her sufferings Honor Walsh saw but her own legitimate revenge, and she vied with Mrs. Carmody herself in her scornful, opprobrious bearing and language.

One day—it was early in May—something occurred, one of those unimportant things on which a whole destiny sometimes hangs, that kept her at home from her work until the mid-day. She was on her way then, hurrying in order to get to her place of employment in

time to "put in" the half-day's work. As she passed out into the street she barely noticed a donkey-cart that was just turning into the arch ; a wizened-looking little old man was sitting in the cart, and, from beneath the brim of a hat that was about four sizes too large for him, took a hard look at her. She never noticed him ; but so attractive did he find her appearance, that he pulled up the willing donkey, and, standing thus and blocking up the arch, he continued to stare after her until she had vanished at the end of the street. Then he got down and led the donkey up the lane.

He was evidently known there, for the women all came to their doors and greeted him in various fashions.

"Dinny the Duck ; and is that yourself ; would ye have a whole tea-pot, do you think, this time ? "

"Ye owld robber"—this gracious salutation

was from Mrs. Carmody—"give me out a new kettle in place o' that egg-shell ye left with me, the last time ye wor here."

"Ladies, ladies, wan at a time, me beautiful cratures. Mrs. Brady, ma'am, I deny yer tay-pot intirely—ye gave it a whack ye intended for himself; an' in the regard of kittles, Mrs. Carmody, sure you know 'tis gev up to the Vartry water for takin' the insides out of thim; that's God's will, so don't go blame poor Dinny the Duck for what's no fault of his."

Then began business; "cast clothes"—i.e. a delicate euphemism of Dinny's for rags of the most uncompromising description—were produced, and a lively scene of barter ensued. The donkey-cart was piled with crockery and glass, tinware, and other varieties of household gear, and for about an hour bargaining and chaffering held undivided sway. At last Dinny the Duck, having lessened his store of *vaisselle*, and purchased therefor a goodly pile

of unclean rags with some coppers thrown in for makeweight, pulled away the bundle of hay that the old donkey was regaling himself on, and requested to be favoured with a light for his pipe.

“ ‘Tis a good long time sin’ I was here, now ; lem’mee see ; just afore Christmas, eh ?— and yez have no news, eh ?”

“ Nary bit,” responded Mrs. Carmody ; “ ‘tis you, thravellin’ man, that ought to bring news.”

“ Have yez no one new in the place, eh ? I thought I seen some one strange an’ I comin’ in.”

“ Ay, Mrs. Walsh, she’s over beyant in the little lean-to cabin.”

This simple answer appeared to produce a very extraordinary effect on Dinny the Duck. He took the newly-kindled pipe out of his mouth, and grinned and waggled so convulsively that the big old hat descended on his head in a manner that threatened to engulf him utterly.

“D’ye know her ?” shrieked Mrs. Carmody, in a perfect ecstasy of eager curiosity. “Mrs. Dowling ! Dinny knows her—Mrs. Walsh.”

“Knows the Game Hen ?” said Dinny, in a contemptuous tone ; “fa’it, I thought every wan knew *her*.”

With much difficulty, and not without the aid of a jug of porter, for which the two ladies paid—not that he was in the least unwilling to tell it, but the old gentleman was in the habit of conducting even his conversation on the strictest business principles—the story of Honor Walsh was extracted from Dinny the Duck. “Her husband was no sailor, nor never was ; had been a gardener, and was serving seven years for killing a ‘peeler.’ She took work, and then went to service at a farmhouse. The farmer’s son, William Kennedy, fell in love with her. She was dismissed ; he followed her.” For the rest he wound up with : “Savin’ yer presence, ladies, ye know

as much as I do." They did, and before Dinny the Duck and his cart of crockery had left the lane every human being therein was familiar with the story.

Rage and indignation filled every heart, and it was well for the Game Hen that she was absent for some hours after the reception of the news. Six o'clock came, more eagerly looked for by the lane than by herself; and, little dreaming of the mine that had been sprung under her feet, Honor Walsh turned her steps homewards. Had she been in an observant state of mind she might have noticed a gathering of the children about the arch, and that on her approach they all looked up, and stared and pointed at her wonderingly—oblivious for the moment of the babies with which the bigger ones were loaded, and the flea-bitten mongrel puppy on which the smaller girls seemed to serve their apprenticeship to nursing. She went on unconsciously, but had

hardly passed through the shadow of the archway when she became aware of the change. A group of women were standing close to her cabin-door, Mrs. Dowling prominent among them, her black eyes burning, and a red spot in each of her olive cheeks. She was holding the nurse-child in her arms, and the instant the mother was close enough handed it over brusquely, accompanying the transference with some pungent remarks, which the bystanders received with a burst of scornful hilarity.

Honor Walsh grasped her baby mechanically; for an instant everything seemed to swim before her eyes, and a nervous trembling seized her from head to foot. Hardly knowing what she did, she held out her hand, in which was some money, to the foster-mother, and tried to say something to her. That hot-tempered lady, however, excited by the applause that had greeted her previous achievement, struck the hand a blow which scattered

the money right and left, accompanying this act with a short, expressive epithet that roused all the latent fire in her opponent's nature. She darted into her house, tossed the baby on to the bed, came out again like a flash, and precipitating herself at Mrs. Dowling, administered to her such a beating as ensured herself from a repetition of the offence so long as the memory of it should last in the lane.

An officious bystander—Mrs. Carmody, probably—despatched a messenger for the police ; but by the time a constable arrived the argument was over. The Game Hen had withdrawn into her cabin and locked the door, through which could be heard long-drawn sobs of anguish, mingled with the wailing of the two children. Moreover, Mrs. Dowling's husband, whose arrival home had put an end to the fray, coldly declined to invoke the vengeance of the law.

A calm that lasted some twenty-four hours

followed this storm. The cabin-door remained obstinately shut, and save Petie, who went out to buy food, none of its inmates were visible. The Game Hen, it was plain, chose to remain hidden from public view. This could not last long, however, for she lived like her class, from day to day, and it was a rare thing for her to have even a couple of shillings in hand. She had little or nothing of property on which to raise money. Her tiny cabin, though scrupulously clean, was almost empty. She had a bed, a straw mattress, no sheets or blankets, a kettle, one pot, and a wire gridiron, which, together with a broken-nosed black tea-pot, formed all her cooking utensils; one chair, a creepy-stool, a rickety table, and a hanging-shelf, on which were a few articles of crockery, constituted the household gear. The table and chair were as white as soap and water could make them, and the window had a couple of geraniums and a pot of musk in it. The floor

was well swept and clean, though she had nothing but a bunch of dried heather for a broom.

It was not much of a place to live in, certainly, but still it was a home; and its owner, crouching before her spark of turf-fire, with the baby lying in her lap, looked round at the little shelter her hands had made, and her heart filled with bitterness and despair at the thought that her poor goods and chattels, which, paltry and insignificant, almost ridiculous, though they were, yet represented so much self-denial and patient labour on her part, were about to be scattered again to the remote quarters whence she had collected them.

She might have lived, she told herself, as carelessly or dirtily as other people; as Mrs. Dowling, whose children's clothes hung together upon their bodies by a special intervention of Providence, although her husband could sometimes earn five-and-thirty shillings

a week ; or like old Bid Connolly and her husband Joe, whose rent was paid for them by their son in America, and whose entire furniture consisted of a heap of unclean straw, on which they lay, like the pair of graceless animals they were. She sewed, and patched, and darned her one old threadbare gown ; and Petie's suit, nearly three sizes too small for him, was clean and whole. She had done her best to retrieve what was past, to keep herself from sinking further and deeper. She was not the same as Peggy and her class, though they wanted to make her one of them and treat her like them ; no, they should never force her into that ; she would die first. And who and what were they all to interfere with her ? she was better born than any of these people. The Connollys were fruit-hawkers, the lowest almost of employments. Mrs. Carmody's father had been a mere "driver," for all her pride in her property and her horse and

car. Mrs. Dowling belonged to the same class; what if she had married a gasfitter? She had had no "rearing," that was easy to see, and had never been anything but a Dublin "slip" with a saucy "gallows" sort of tongue, and a good-looking, bold face. She had been good to the baby, though, thought Honor Walsh, with a sad look at it; for it was pining since the foster-mother had so unceremoniously resigned her charge. The milk she got to buy was bad and dear, one-third water, and not even fair measure with that. Sixpence was all the money she had in the house now. Was it worth while making an effort to go on at all? She might as well turn out and beg at once, for they would never let her live.

Worn out with grief and trouble, she crept into her bed, not so much for the sake of rest as to save fire and candle. As soon as daylight broke she was up and about. Her naturally active habit of body and mind forbade

further inaction, and she determined, for the sake of the children, as well as to show her own spirit, that she would not give in.

She gave Petie the sixpence, and having kindled the fire, showed him how to warm milk in a jam-pot, and to sop bread and brown sugar in it; then she confided, not without sad misgiving, the five months' old child to him, and set off to the rag-store where she worked. She was sure of employment there at any time, for she did more work for the money than any of the other women there. None of them knew anything about her, not even where she lived; and as she took her seat by a heap of dirty odds and ends to sort them out, she drew a deep breath of relief to think that here at least she was safe from the sneering, contemptuous faces, or the taunts and jeers of her neighbours in the lane. How long this security would last she could not tell, she hardly dared even to think, and her

thoughts soon wandered back to the children at home: Petie was no safe guardian, and the baby was too heavy for his feeble arms. How in the world would they get on? He could feed her cleverly enough, and he might be safely trusted not to leave his charge, for he was very fond of her; but if he should let the child fall, or wander out into the streets with her!

She sorted with a kind of feverish energy, and when the long day's work was done hurried home, half wild from suspense and anxiety. On turning the corner of the lane she perceived the two children sitting at her cabin-door waiting for her, Petie looking as tired as she was herself, with the baby seated on his knee. The day had not gone so badly after all. In the afternoon, Mrs. Dowling, unable to withstand any longer the crying of the de-relict infant, had sent for it, fed it with properly-made food, and hushed it to sleep, warn-

ing Petie on no account to tell his mother this; to impress this injunction on his memory she gave him a share of her own children's dinner—potatoes and greasy cabbage.

The next day and the day after passed like this. Honor Walsh went with a less weight of anxiety each morning to her work. But in measure as this load of anxiety was removed from her, she began to feel her own personal trouble more. Her life in the lane was now perfectly isolated, not one of the women would speak to her; of them all, Mrs. Carmody was the worst. She tried to influence the landlady to turn the Game Hen out of her cabin; but that potentate was not a resident in the lane, and was quite indifferent as to the character of those who lived there, provided she got the rent regularly. Moreover, the back wall of Honor Walsh's cabin was in a ruinous state, and would necessitate a certain outlay before a new tenant could occupy it; the rent was

threepence a week too dear, and was always punctually paid ; so she declined to further the amiable projects of her friend, who had taken upon herself the *rôle* of visible instrument of a righteous Providence. A certain Mrs. Burke, who let lodgings, and who was charitable or timid, avoided encountering the Game Hen, but on one occasion, meeting her as she passed up the archway on her way home from work, she bid her the time of day in a half-hearted kind of way. When called to account for this dereliction of matronly conduct, she alleged as an excuse—whether she intended the excuse for herself or the pariah is not clear—that times were hard, and it was not easy living—aphorisms seemingly irrelevant, but not without a meaning to herself ; and she began then, in amends, to show her deference to public opinion by abusing the black sheep with all her might.

Lonely and unhappy as Honor Walsh was, her spirit was yet unbroken. She stared Mrs.

Carmody boldly in the face, and took the wall of her in the one or two opportunities she had of thus testifying her contempt, and she never replied save by a careless word to Mrs. Burke's greeting.

The determined and cruel way in which these women closed up their ranks against her afforded a curious contrast to their attitude towards the black sheep of the place ; the three people to whom Mrs. Carmody had alluded as the "charackters" who inhabited the big old house at the corner. There were a couple of young women (of whom one was Peggy), and an old one, and all three of them might naturally be supposed to merit the obloquy and scorn visited so lavishly on the Game Hen. It was not so, however ; they were disapproved, certainly, and the lane was not on visiting terms with these, nor they with it. Nevertheless, their position was an easier one, and there was a certain meed of toleration extended to them

—a kind of vicarious out-of-door communication maintained, the reason being, no doubt, that the line of demarcation was in their instance laid down and acknowledged by both sides as tangible and real, whereas on the other it was only in process of creation.

Had the Game Hen accepted the position defined for her by the social rulers of Commons Lane, she might have enjoyed a portion at least of the amenities of both parties. Not so, however ; Honor Walsh kept more rigidly aloof from these outcasts than did any of the censorious matrons from herself. Of these Peggy was the youngest. She was a country girl, as we know, barely more than twenty, though there was little to tell of youth or the country either in her haggard white face. She had a gentle, subdued manner, and a sweet voice. During his mother's absence Peggy was always kind and friendly to Petie ; she protected him from the other children in the lane, who, when

his strange fits came on, teased and mocked him. She often spent the afternoon with him and the baby from the time of her own appearance, which was seldom earlier than four o'clock, until near six, when Petie's mother returned, and Peggy, who, without knowing why, feared her instinctively, quitted the scene. She knew nothing about her, and she had never heard of the pedlar and his story, for of course she was carefully kept outside the social life of the lane. But even her dread of the fierce, contemptuous looks of Mrs. Walsh did not restrain her from showing kindness to those two desolate little creatures, who, of all the children with which the place was swarming, were the only ones with whom she was permitted intercourse. The others either knew what she was or aped unconsciously their parents' manner to her. Petie's mental infirmity and the baby's youth forbade this, so she had them in a way all to herself.

One lovely May evening the girl was seated with her two friends in a sunny spot at the back wall of Mrs. Carmody's cottage ; the baby was asleep lying across Peggy's lap, and she was talking in a low voice to the boy, and every now and again stroking with her white, soft fingers the infant's cheek. There was a curious air of innocence, even of rurality, about the scene : Mrs. Burke's pig lay on his side a little way off and contemplated the trio with an air of beatitude, and Mrs. Carmody's cock and hens preened their feathers before retiring for the night, as they waited their mistress's summons to supper. The lane was deserted, for it was the hour of the evening meal, the nature of which might be guessed—for it was Friday—from the odour of herrings that filled the air.

The slanting rays of the evening sun fell on Peggy's tangle of gold-brown hair, and Petie frowned till his red eyebrows made a kind of pent-house for his eyes. They had

lingered longer than usual together, tempted probably by the beauty of the May evening ; the swallows, newly arrived, were circling and screaming above the field at the back of the cottage, and a linnet, prisoned in a tiny cage, sang its loudest and sweetest. Peggy fixed her eyes dreamily on a pair of swifts that came wheeling over their heads.

“ Do ever ye wish ye could fly, Petie ? ” she said ; and as she watched the birds disappear into the higher air, a longing, anxious look mingled itself with the sadness habitual to her face. Some old memory awoke and stirred like a pain that has been lulled and returns. For one moment Mary Kennedy was at home again in the yard at milking-time ; the whole air was sweet of the cows’ scented breath, and the milk was hissing and frothing in the cans ; the swallows were wheeling overhead and calling to each other as they were doing now in the yellow light of

the summer sky ; she could hear it all once more, like music in a dream.

“ Fly !” echoed Petie, with a quaint little smile that seemed to say, “ I am not so foolish as that ; eh, Peggy ?” He looked up in her face, but she had covered it with one of her hands as if to shut out the sight of something painful to her.

At that very moment it was that the children’s mother, missing them from their usual post of waiting—the corner of the lane—advanced down it in search of them. She was tired and hungry, and felt more dispirited and rebellious than ever ; in her hand she was carrying a package of provisions for her supper and Petie’s. On catching sight of the group at the cottage wall she stopped, as if thunderstruck, and drew a deep, short breath of fury. Everything seemed to dance before her eyes. To hurl the parcel into the thoroughfare and rush upon them like a thunder-

bolt was the work of an instant. She snatched up the sleeping baby with one hand, and with the other dealing the startled Peggy a blow that stunned her, turned, and, followed closely by Petie, who ran at her heels with the air of a frightened rabbit, made for her own den. On the door-stone she stopped, her thin, dark face glowing, and, showing her gleaming teeth, flung back some denunciation or defiance, which her passion, defeating its own ends, rendered unintelligible. But at that same instant her eyes fell on the large figure of Mrs. Carmody, whom the din had fetched from her repast, and who, her jaws still moving leisurely, was standing in her own doorway. Every kind of wicked passion seemed to crowd and struggle for the mastery in the malignant countenance which the old woman turned on the object of her hatred and persecution.

“Dear!” she called, in her strident, scornful voice, “but yer exact. Ha! ha!”

Her loud laugh rang out like a tocsin through the lane, and summoned the people to their doors. The Game Hen had raised her head for a moment at first as if to reply, but the laugh and all the scorn and hate its sound seemed to convey, and which was caught up and re-echoed everywhere around, overcame her. Her head drooped, and with a groan of despair she entered her house and shut the door.

A conference was held that night by the lane, outraged beyond endurance by this last piece of audacity on the part of the Game Hen, the outcome of which was that Paudheen rose earlier than was his wont the following morning, and tracked the unhappy victim to the rag-store where she worked. What this diplomatist accomplished then, and how, is best known to himself and to those whose accredited agent he was; but when Honor Walsh arrived a short time later, she found

the atmosphere of the yard raised to much the same unpleasant degree of temperature as the lane : gibes and innuendoes were the order of the day. Nor was this all. Bid Connolly, in the intervals of fruit and fish hawking, did charwoman's work ; but only occasionally, for she had such confused ideas as to property that she very rarely was employed twice in the same house. However, the autocratic Mrs. Carmody chose to consider her friend aggrieved by the fact of the Game Hen's constant weekly employment at a good house in Gardiner Street, and in whatever manner she arranged it, it so happened that when next Honor Walsh presented herself at the door of the same house, she was met with the response that their work would in future be given to a "respectable person." Then the big hall-door was shut in a sudden and uncivil manner, the noise of it re-echoing through the empty street with a desolate, lonely sound

that seemed to ring through her head for days after.

This was the last chance now, and she let herself fall on the kerbstone before the house in a kind of torpor of despair. She remained there for a long time—hours perhaps. After a while she rose and wandered away aimlessly. At last she found herself in one of those old, deserted, weed-grown streets on the north side of Dublin. It was well into May now, and the sun shone down with a comforting warmth on her thin, worn frame. She could feel the glow of it through her threadbare garments; the sun, at least, knew no difference, made no distinction. The mignonette in the window-box behind her did not withhold its perfume, and the willow-trees by the canal at the end of the street swayed as gracefully and musically to the south wind's caresses as though this guilty, branded outcast had been miles away. She leaned against the railings and folded her

hands, hard and disfigured with toil, under her apron.

“There was nothing for it,” she told herself despairingly, “but to go on the tramp, to lead the life of a beggar, to drag Petie and the baby backwards and forwards along miles of weary highway, and to starve always. She must make up her mind to that, for they would never let her live.”

A step coming up the street caught her attention, a lady was approaching. She rose in obedience to a sudden impulse, and holding out her hand, curtsied, and with a strange-sounding voice that she hardly recognised for her own, said :

“A copper for my two little children, ma’am.”

The lady glanced sharply at her, and meeting a pair of wild-looking bright eyes fixed, with a look which she mistook for threatening, upon her, said stoutly, secure in the presence

of a big policeman a little farther down the street: "You ought to be at work, a woman so young and strong as you."

"Work!" echoed the beggar, in whose ears the words rang like some mocking taunt. "Work!" she repeated with a bitter voice, and showing her teeth.

"I'll give you in charge, my good woman," returned the lady, half alarmed, but not seriously meaning her words. She turned her head as she spoke, to see if the policeman was near.

When she looked round again the beggar was gone.

"Evil, be thou my good," seemed from that hour to be the rule of life adopted by the now utterly desperate woman. She threw herself into wicked courses, with a determination and a thoroughness that left her worst enemies, even Mrs. Carmody, nothing to desire. She took to drinking, she neglected her children,

and she flung to the winds every vestige of decency.

Her violence made her a terror to the whole lane. Mrs. Dowling and Mrs. Carmody in particular went in dread of her. She was seldom there, but her advent was uncertain, as was also her humour and condition.

Petie and the baby might have starved, had it not been for the charity of the inhabitants of the place. Peggy and Mrs. Dowling divided the charge of the baby between them and sent Petie out begging. He was not strong enough to carry it with him, and though they recognised the fact that by keeping the infant at home they were depriving him of a very powerful advantage—a baby being to a beggar a most important part of the plant, or stock-in-trade—the *ci-devant* foster-mother would not hear of risking its bones by entrusting the child to Petie's unskilled and feeble hands.

"Girl," she said one day to Peggy, who was urging the increment of receipts likely to ensue on sending the baby out with Petie, "no one that knows anything 'ud spake ov such a thing; the polis even wudn't allow it."

The lofty, distant manner with which Mrs. Dowling conveyed this piece of information to Peggy was in its way inimitable. The condescending tone of instruction, with a strong vein of contemptuous reproof running through it, her very attitude, standing at her own door, one lazy shoulder propped against the jamb, contrasted with the shamefaced, humble bearing of Peggy, who hardly raised her timid eyes to the matron's motherly, handsome, dirty countenance.

"Give us her here," continued Mrs. Dowling, holding out her hands to take the child from Peggy; "'deed then," she said, addressing the baby, "but yer time enough into

hardship, God help ye, an' not be put to cadgin' this early time o' yer life."

Peggy relinquished her charge without offering any comment. She was standing beside Petie a little farther out in the lane and close to the stream which formed the centre of and divided the thoroughfare. This stream, which was black and ill-odoured, and received as many confluent streams as there were cabins in the lane, was the common and only sewer of the place.

"Go off, Petie," commanded Mrs. Dowling, "an' bring home something, av ye fake it itself. Go, Petie."

"Go, Petie—ay!" he echoed, in his strange voice, and turned at once and trotted up the lane.

"God forgive me for giving a child a bad advice," observed Mrs. Dowling, putting one of her black elf locks back from her face, and gazing after him pensively.

The ragged little figure halted at the arch and looked back ; the forenoon sun was shining on his red hair, and he puckered his pinched little white face to look back at his patrons for an instant ; then he passed into the shadow through the archway and out into the street, to pick up the day's food, as insignificant and more solitary than a sparrow, and, like a sparrow, too, unfriended and uncared for, save from on High.

Peggy, also, looked after him, and with sad eyes ; but she found something to envy in Petie's lot ; he was better off than she was, she told herself bitterly, and she looked all round the lane with a loathing and a disgust so intense that it became almost a pain. The clear, hot sunlight searched every cranny, laying bare to view all the squalor and dilapidation : the broken windows, mended with rags, paper, or old hats ; the doors tumbling off their fastenings ; the plaster stripping off the

walls ; and the crop of ugly weeds, whose rank, luxuriant growth was the only sign of summer here, bristling like a frouzy beard on top of Mrs. Carmody's thatched cottage ; and while making plain and visible all this ugliness, it beat down, too, on Peggy's tossed brown hair, and added to the sense of *malaise* that possessed her. She wanted to offer to take the baby from Mrs. Dowling, whose own brood were clamouring from within for her attention ; but she felt shy, and shifted uneasily her feet, which were cased in high-heeled button boots, not one button of which was fastened.

Just then the door of the next cabin opened, and a woman came out with a large pail of dirty water.

“ Good-morning, Mrs. Brady,” hailed Mrs. Dowling in a curiously eager tone of voice.

Mrs. Brady vouchsafed a look and made a sort of gesture with her head in token of having

heard, as she took aim at the sewer with her pail. It was wonderfully significant, this gesture, and Mrs. Dowling felt it to be so, and moved forwards at once.

“Mrs. Brady,” she began, “what way is himself now?”

“Battherin,” replied Mrs. Brady concisely, at the same time discharging the pail with emphasis, and somewhat short of its mark; she returned to her house without another word and banged the door.

“He’s never come off of that since Thursda’, an’ has lost his tack again,” remarked Mrs. Dowling, more to herself than to Peggy. “That crature goes through tormints wid him; did ye notice her eye?”

Peggy looked sympathetic and nodded, thereby fibbing, for she had studiously avoided looking at Mrs. Brady.

“She has no children, ye see,” went on Mrs. Dowling in the tone of one explaining

and accounting for things. An outcry from behind startled her suddenly.

“Take her, will ye ?” she cried, hurriedly handing over the baby, “an’ let me get something done wid the children.”

“If—if she comes !” Peggy hesitated.

“No fears ; anyhow, ‘twont last long now ; she’s to be out of the house a Frida’ ; paid no rent, and Mrs. Maguire is to present her wit the key of the sthreet. What can the woman do ? Let *her* go to the workhouse. Oh, ye tormints of me life. Here I am now to regulate yez.” This latter portion of her speech was addressed to her children, to whom she at last proceeded to devote herself.

On Friday, as Mrs. Dowling, a first-rate authority on all matters of public interest, had stated, Honor Walsh was to be ejected from her house. Fate, however, so willed it that her landlady, Mrs. Maguire, should be spared the trouble.

Animated, probably, by the same feeling which prompted King Cetewayo's historic utterance :—" I am to be a wanderer ; but before I go, I shall let men see something"—the Game Hen, desperate, and thirsting for revenge, arrived home one night about nine o'clock, and making straight for Mrs. Carmody's house, invited her ancient enemy out for a battle. This being declined, there remained nothing to be done but assail her within her fortress.

What there transpired, Mrs. Dowling, who was one of the first of the rescuing party, related succinctly :

" Mrs. Carmody swounded wid the dint of pure fright, an' *she* passed no remarks but flew on the dresser like a mad cat, and left not a plate nor a haporth bud she destroyed."

There was a terrible commotion : the poultry, rudely awakened, fluttered screaming in the faces of the people whom the noise gathered

in excited assemblage. The police were summoned, and the delinquent, fighting to the last, carried off to prison.

Mrs. Carmody, who was at once and unanimously elected to be "killed," and who was seriously injured, was conveyed to hospital.

When Paudheen arrived with the horse and car half-an-hour later he was forthwith presented by a dozen voices at least with the facts of the case in their very crudest aspects.

"Kilt!" cried Paudheen, who was sober, with a sort of howl. "Bud didn't I tell yez? Didn't I, Mrs. Dowlin'?" he appealed to that matron, raising his voice to a shout. "I sed she'd do it; sez I, 'She'll airn her hangin' on ye,' sez I; an', an'—she's done it."

Here Paudheen's feelings overcame him, and having conclusively established his claim to prophetic instinct, he leant against the horse and covered his face with his arm.

Mrs. Dowling paid him little attention;

she was vainly endeavouring to collect an audience to listen to some piece of news which she was in possession of, and which had the disadvantage of not being immediately concerning this latest sensation. Everybody was speculating, with an intensity of interest hardly derived from mere affection, on the extent and nature of Mrs. Carmody's injuries ; others were curiously inspecting the damages wrought in the interior of her cabin, and making the best of their opportunity among her loose property. She laid hold at last of her taciturn neighbour, Mrs. Brady.

“ Oh ! wait till I tell ye ! Did ye see him ? him ? The man was here a while ago lookin' for the Game Hen. Oh, laws ! the state he was in when I told him the way she was goin' on. He asked as much, and where he cud find her. How cud I know, to tell him ; ga' 'm all the information I knew ; an' mind ye, the husband, Walsh, that killed the peeler,—

wait till I tell ye ! he's dead in prison there a week ago. The news came out to Lucan, and this man Kennedy it is, don' ye remember that Dinny the Duck told us ov, came off at once to find her."

"To find her ?" echoed Mrs. Brady.

"Ay, maybe he'd marry her now."

"Sorra fears !" retorted Mrs. Brady, contemptuously.

"What luck that he didn't come a little sooner ; he'd have met her, an' maybe things 'ud have been different," said Mrs. Dowling, with something of melancholy in her voice and eyes.

"Hah ! it was to be," replied Mrs. Brady, folding her arms, and leaning against the wall ; " 'twas God done it, so it was ;" cruel exultation ringing in every tone of her words.

Mrs. Dowling glared at her with anger and disgust. "Augh, woman !" she cried, "don't go mix up God an' drink an' divilment that

way. He's off lookin' for Peggy now. I was tellin' him the Game Hen seemed as if she knew her. Faix, I can't make it out at all, at all, Mrs. Brady; an' now I think of it, Peggy has a great look of him. Yis, bedad, the drawn image of him, so she is, about the eyes; what cud it be made him go so dead white when he asked me what like the girl was?"

"I dunno, I'm sure; they say that wan'll get a couple of year—there's money missing, Paudheen says."

"Believe wan word 'ud come out ov Paudheen's head; no, not if he paid me! If that man had only come wan half-hour sooner, or that I'd the grace to keep him. But there's the way, too late or too soon; God help us all;" and Mrs. Dowling, almost crying, went into her house, and shut the door.

Meantime, in the wretched den that had been to him a home Petie was crouched, in an agony of wild terror. The crowd, the con-

fusion of voices, and the indescribable din without, acted on him like some exciting drug; every limb trembled uncontrollably, and not even the wailing of the hungry, helpless baby, lying on the heap of straw that now served them for a bed—the bedstead had been sold—could rouse him.

Alone, and in the dark, the child suffered tortures of body and mind; a shrill-sounding cry from time to time breaking from him like the plaint of some wild animal, tortured and driven and in its last extremity.

The hungry little creature in the straw wailed itself to sleep at last. Night fell, and with it came home to Commons Lane peace and forgetfulness. Petie's shrill sobs and writhings grew fainter and fewer by degrees; he had leaned back against the damp wall, and, with wide open empty eyes, was staring through the chinks of the door at the darkness without. He heard a stealthy foot approach slowly and

cautiously amid the gloom, and before he could get up the door was pushed gently backwards on its hinges, and Peggy stood before him.

“Petie,” she whispered timidly; “are you there, Petie?”

“Petie, ay, Petie,” he echoed weakly, yet eagerly, getting up with difficulty from his corner.

On recognising her, he uttered a sort of cry, and produced a handful of coppers and held them out to her.

“Keep them,” said Peggy, putting aside his hand. “Where’s the child?” She put her shoulder, as she spoke, against the broken door, and lifting it noiselessly, got in. She threw aside a shawl which covered her, and producing a little cracked, dirty jug in which was some bread and milk, she lifted up the baby. There was nothing to sit on, and there was no light, so she returned to the doorway, and crouching on the threshold, began to feed

it. The creature wailed for an instant, but the food quieted it; and Petie, gnawing at a piece of bread which Peggy gave him, watched her with a contented look. Some sound without startled the party. Petie moved forward eagerly.

“It’s not your mother,” said Peggy, who had not even looked. The baby had eaten all the food, and she was laying it quietly back in the straw.

“Mother, eh!” he repeated, catching her gown, and looking beseechingly at her.

“Whisht, child; let me go,” replied she peevishly; “she’ll come soon.”

“Soon,” echoed the boy contentedly, releasing her dress.

Peggy ran off, carrying her jug with her, and Petie, with a new light in his face, crept out, leaving the door ajar, and passing down the lane, took up his post at the entrance of the archway to wait.

The street was silent and deserted, and the ugly, shabby old houses that lifted their broken parapets and uneven roofs against the gray wall of the night were all of them dark and quiet ; one or two still showed lights, among them the one hard close by, where Peggy lived.

From the left, as he looked out, came a chill, damp air from the river, and the dull clouded sky, that now showed neither star nor moon, overshadowed everything as with a pall. Petie stood watching for a long time, and at last, tired and cold, he retreated under the arch to a sheltered recess that commanded a view of the opening. There he let himself drop into a sort of hollow, and, leaning against the wall, gazed persistently out of the darkness at the semicircle of grayish light presented by the other end of the arch.

Now and again a bat flitted by, and once a policeman tramped past and turned his bull's-

eye right into the archway. He did it in a sleepy, perfunctory manner, however, that missed the crouched figure which shrank into itself against the wall on hearing the heavy tread.

It was a chilly night, and the half-clad, half-fed little creature was numbed with the cold. He tried to keep awake, watching for her who was coming "soon," but every now and then he fell into a kind of torpor, from which he woke with a start, dreaming that he heard his mother's footsteps. At last he fell asleep altogether, and this time without dreaming. How long the child lay there in the dark shelter of the archway on the stony hollow he had chosen is unknown ; but after many hours had passed, when the darkness was giving place to day, a door opening near startled him from his slumbers.

It was not in the lane, it was in the street outside, and presently in the gray space de-

fined before the arch two figures appeared ; a slender girlish one, and a tall broad-shouldered man. She was sobbing bitterly, and he, apparently against her will, was holding her firmly by one shoulder.

“No, no,” she cried brokenly ; “oh no ! how could I ?”

“We thought to hear of you every day,” groaned the man ; “we all thought you had gone out to America to Margaret without telling us, in a freak. O my God, but I’ve been punished this day ! And to find you here—you of all !”

He had thrown himself against the railing, standing always between her and the door of the house they had left.

“There, I have the money with me ; I meant to——I was late, one half-hour late, an’ she’s in prison. I’ll take you now this minute to the Liverpool boat on the North Wall. She goes at eight, av you’ll only say

the word, an' leave this place of perdition for ever."

She had hidden her face in her shawl, and a long, half-choked sob was the only sign she made of having heard him.

"Mary, raise yourself; for God's sake, I implore you! Go."

The muffled sobs came faster and thicker. She had thrown one arm round the spikes of the railings and rested her head upon it, and the tossed brown curls were hanging in disorder about her face.

"Mary, once again, for your mother's sake, take it and go."

"O God! O God! how can I go?"

She wrung her hands despairingly, and held them clasped above her head. "How can I go?" she cried.

"Go!" echoed Petie, whose dull ear the half scream has reached, startling him. He tried to get up, but his limbs were stiff with

cold and weakness, and he fell back again in his form.

The clear, strange note of the child's voice fell on the two without as if it came from above.

“Did you—did you hear that?” the girl gasped. She seized his arm and clung to him. He looked all round, his eyes staring and his cheeks blanched. There was nothing to be seen but the gray, deserted street, above which the dawn of the new day was fast breaking in the sky.

With one simultaneous impulse they took each other's hands and passed from before the archway and down the street, and then towards the river, eastwards, the red morning sun kissing Peggy's face as she turned towards it, and gilding her brown head as with a glory.

* * * * *

Petie was discovered, still asleep, under the archway next morning by the gasfitter Dow-

ling on his way to work. After a short consultation with his wife, the gasfitter determined to report the destitute condition of the boy at the nearest police station. She took the baby home to her own house, for a day or two, she said, until they would see what was to be done with it; but the day or two extended indefinitely; perhaps Mrs. Dowling had some qualms of conscience, or thought to make amends, but the baby never left her again; and she brought it up with her own children.

Petie was charged before a divisional magistrate with vagrancy, and was sentenced to five years in an industrial school.

He had little idea of what they meant. However; after an hour's waiting in the court, which he occupied in eating some biscuits which they gave him, a big sergeant of police, with a good-humoured jolly face set in a framing of black beard, took his hand and led him out once more into the street. An out-

side car was waiting. The policeman lifted him up as lightly as if he had been a feather, dropped him on the seat, and then hoisted his own burly frame beside him.

“Artane,” he said to the driver.

“That’s all that is goin’ this morning!” observed the carman as he got up at the other side to balance the car.

“That’s all,” repeated the sergeant.

“Tis a small commodity,” remarked the carman, squinting back at the little crouched-up figure which, beside that of the big burly policeman, looked a mere atom of misery and wretchedness; “dawny-lookin’ crature.”

“Country air will do him good,” said the sergeant, leaning his elbow on the well, and hoisting his left leg comfortably over his right.

Off they set through grimy lanes and dirty by-streets. Petie was too frightened and astonished to look about him; his little bare legs stuck out straight over the side of the

car, his head was sunk on his breast, and he was crying quietly.

The North Strand was passed soon, and Ballybough Bridge, where the Tolka pours its muddy tides into the north-west corner of the bay. The winding shore-road of Clontarf stretched away before them to where Howth raised its blue profile above the gleaming waters, and opposite across the bay lay the line of the Dublin mountains shining like emeralds in the noontide sun.

Petie stopped crying from sheer wonder, and took a good look at the sea. But a sudden turn of the car round the wall of Charlemont demesne shut it out, and there was nothing but a vista of green fields and hawthorn-hedges to be seen.

“Not far now,” said the carman; “there’s the house.” He meant this sociably for Petie, but the child never stirred to look; and pointed with his whip to where, through the

fresh June greenery on their right hand, lay a tall white house. The car stopped suddenly at a handsome stone gate, which a lodge-woman opened, casting as she did so a cursory glance at the figure beside the policeman. He and she exchanged salutations as the car drove through.

“Now, sonny,” said the policeman in a kind tone to Petie, “you’re at home ; look up !”

Petie glanced round him timidly. Two great fields lay on either side of the roadway, planted with potatoes in long even drills ; the strong growing smell of them filled the air. There were trees everywhere, and all around the white house a blaze of flowers ; arbutus, and flowering acacias and hawthorns, dotted the turf of the pretty garden ; but they had not much time to admire it. Directly the wheels ceased to grind the gravel the glass doors of the entrance flew open.

“Good-morning, sir :” the sergeant hailed

some one whom he saw inside the hall as he jumped off; then he lifted Petie down, and pushing him quickly in before him, they entered together a large hall painted a clean, cool, green colour. In this hall was standing the person to whom the sergeant's greeting had been addressed. This was an old priest—tall and thin, and with a kind, wrinkled face.

“Good-morning, sergeant, good-morning,” he replied in a pleasant voice; “only one this time, eh?”

Then some entries were copied from the sergeant's memorandum-book into another volume.

“Commons Lane!” repeated the old priest; “I have two boys, brothers, here from Commons Lane already. I will take him round—he looks a sickly, frightened little creature—and see if they know him.”

“Good-morning, sir,” said the policeman, wiping his pen and putting it in his pocket.

The glass doors shut upon him, and they heard the car drive off; the gravel crunched for a little while, then came the clang of the distant gate across the field, and all was still. It took only a few minutes in all; yet to Petie, standing timidly by the door listening to the ticking of the clock on the chimney-piece, it seemed an hour or more.

The old priest finished his writing at last. "Come, little boy," he said encouragingly; "there, don't be afraid, you will find plenty of friends here." He took Petie's hand, and leading him, went out.—"I want to find the small boy I have here from Commons Lane. I wonder if you know him; he's bigger than you, although he's only seven. He will be in this house knitting, that is his work. Would you like to learn to knit?"

They had walked round the house, and came to a great building situated at its back. A door opened, letting out an extraordinary

sound, a kind of low murmur, like that of swarming bees, and mingled with and rising above it the rapid click clack of sewing machines. A long hall lay before them with two rows of benches, the inner one higher than the other, along the wall; and on these benches sat about a hundred small boys, all of them under ten, some of them not yet six years old. Each had on a clean white blouse and a pair of red slippers.

Everybody was working; some tiny creatures had crochet needles in their hands, some were knitting, and others stitching. More advanced ones were tending the sewing machines, which they worked with a gravity and steadiness that was wonderful. The boards of the floor were scoured white, the paint was fresh and clean, and through the tall, open windows came sweet-smelling country air. All the eyes were turned on the new-comer at once.

The priest in charge came walking up from

the far end of the room. "I want Paul, the curly-headed boy, Paul Cassidy," said Petie's guardian, the old priest, looking round the room ; I want to see if he knows this child, Petie Walsh. They are from the same lane."

"There is his seat vacant yonder," replied the priest in charge. "If you like I can put this child beside him to-morrow ; I sent him out to the gardener there a while ago. He hates being shut up here to work."

Petie's eyes followed those of the priest to Paul Cassidy's place. A blouse was tidily folded up on the back of the bench, and a pair of smart red slippers lay in their place before it.

"Well, well," said his guardian, "I must only go round to the shoemaker's and look if his brother is there, Peter Cassidy ; he maybe will recollect this child. Come, Petie."

The workroom door closed, and they went on to a low wooden building that ran round

three sides of a play-ground. This building was composed of workshops — tailor's, carpenter's, joiner's, painter's — boys were learning trades in all parts of it as they passed through. The shoemaker's was reached at last. The old priest touched a boy on the shoulder, who was stooped over a last which he held upon his knee.

“Peter Cassidy,” he said, “do you remember seeing this boy in Commons Lane when you lived there?”

Peter Cassidy sat up straight in a very sudden manner, as if he had got a start, showing a pair of bright black eyes set in an ugly pock-marked face. He turned a sharp look at his questioner, then bent his gaze on Petie.

“What's your name?” he asked, after a prolonged investigation of Petie's white, troubled little face.

“Petie Walsh,” replied for him the old priest.

Peter Cassidy shook his head.

“I disremember him, sir,” he said ; and then, whether it was an unpremeditated action, or he meant it as a hint to his visitors that his time was valuable, he picked up a wooden peg from the bench beside him, and rolled it between his finger and thumb.

“Come along, Petie Walsh,” said the priest ; “we will go to the gardeners and look for my boy Paul.”

The gardeners were variously employed when their domain was reached, and Paul Cassidy was pointed out far away in a field of cabbages hoeing by himself.

They walked along the cabbage-field, by its selvage, which was formed of a neatly-grown drill of parsley, thyme, mint, and other odorous herbs. When they came near to where Paul Cassidy was stationed, the old priest called him by his name. No answer was made by the straw-hatted figure out among the cabbages.

“Paul Cassidy, Paul,” the old priest called louder.

Still no answer.

“Tatters! you rogue,” shouted the old gentleman, “why on earth don’t you answer to your own name?”

The cabbage-hoer launched his implement into the air, and came running towards them, kicking his legs over the cabbages as he came along in a way that boded well for his independence and good spirits. When he reached them, out of breath, he took off his straw hat, showing a white forehead and a crop of crisp fair curls above the sunburnt red cheeks.

“Humph!” said his patron, good-humouredly, surveying him, “so you would rather be weeding than knitting, eh?”

Tatters, whose early upbringing had certainly predisposed him to outdoor pursuits, showed a set of white even teeth as he looked

confidently in the old priest's face, and nodded for an answer.

"Did you ever see this child before?"

Paul Cassidy laid the back of his disengaged hand against his mouth before answering, and opening a pair of large blue eyes to their fullest width, fixed them on Petie's face.

"Eh?" repeated the questioner. "He comes from Commons Lane."

A grave nod from Paul Cassidy gave evidence that he had taken in the question in all its bearings, and was revolving it in his own inner consciousness. Presently he raised his eyes from the new boy's face to that of the old priest, and made answer solemnly: "I nefer seed him afore, sir."

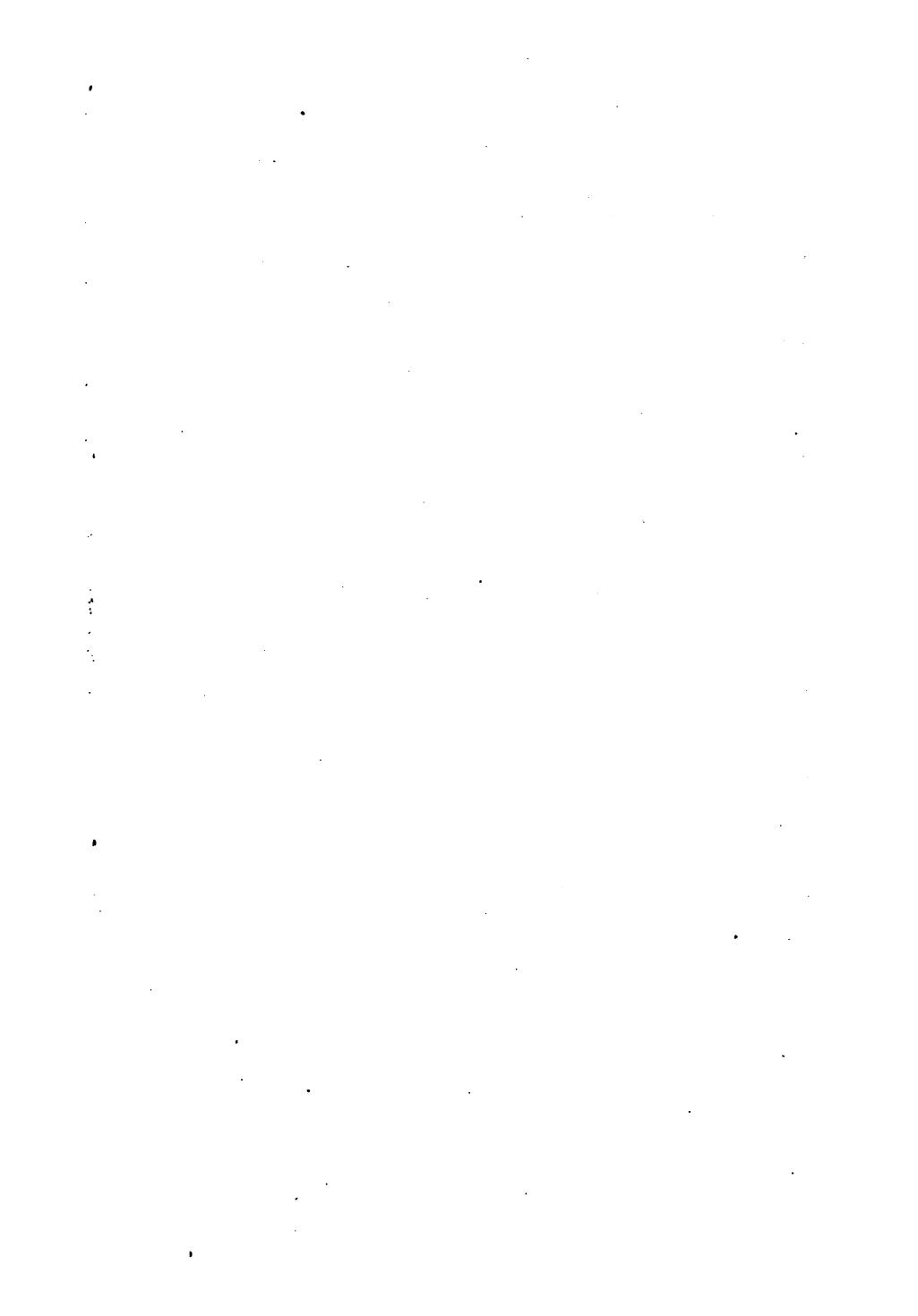
"Very well, Paul, that will do; but you must be kind to him, and look after him. I must send him now to get a bath and have his hair cut. Go back to your work,

Paul. Are you busy ?" he asked, with an amused smile, on seeing the business-like manner in which the *ci-devant* Tatters turned to resume his hoeing.

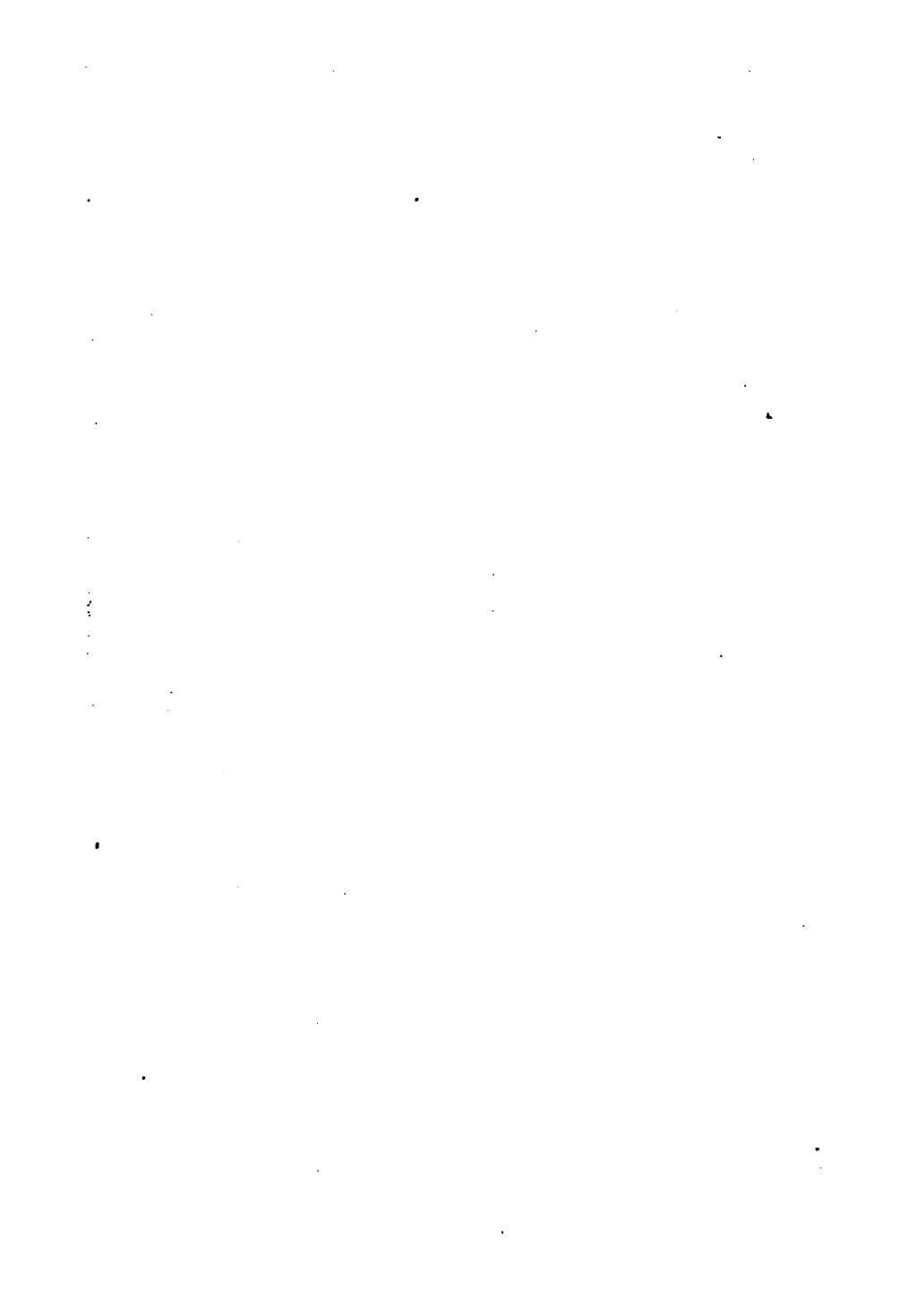
" Yes, sir," replied Tatters, with a serious and important air ; " I have two rows to do before I get my supper."

" All right, Paul ; work away, that's a good boy."

The old priest turned homewards, leading Petie by the hand ; when he reached the hedge which divided the cabbage-field from the offices, he turned, and shading his eyes from the sun with one hand, looked back. Dandelion and scutch, chickweed and groundsel, were flying in clouds before the hoe, and the gardener's curly head was bent immovably on his task.



BAUBIE CLARK



BAUBIE CLARK.

“I HAVE taken you at your word, you see, Miss Mackenzie. You told me not to give alms in the street, and to bring the begging children to you. So here is one now.”

Thus introduced, the begging child was pushed forward into the room by the speaker, a lady who was holding her by one shoulder.

She was a stunted, slim creature, that might have been any age from nine to fourteen, barefooted and bareheaded, and wearing a Rob Roy tartan frock. She entered in a sidelong way, that was at once timid and confidently independent, and stared all round her with a pair of large brown eyes. She did not

seem to be in the least frightened, and when released by her guardian, stood at ease comfortably on one foot, tucking the other away out of sight among the not too voluminous folds of her frock.

It was close on twelve of a March day in the poor sewing-women's workroom in Drummond Street. The average number of women of the usual sort were collected together—a depressed and silent gathering. It seemed as if the bitter east wind had dulled and chilled them into a grayer monotony of look than usual, so that they might be in harmony with the general aspect which things without had assumed at its grim bidding. A score or so of wan faces looked up for a minute, but the child, after all, had nothing about her that was calculated to repay attention, and the lady was known to them all. So "white seam" reasserted its authority without much delay.

Miss Mackenzie laid down a pair of scissors

which she had been using on a bit of coarse cotton, and advanced in reply to the address of the new-comer.

“How do you do? and where did you pick up this creature?” she asked, looking curiously at the importation.

“Near George the Fourth Bridge, on this side of it, and I just took hold of her and brought her off to you at once. I don’t believe”—this was said *sotto voce*—“that she has a particle of clothing on her but that frock.”

“Very likely. What is your name, my child?”

“Baubie Clark, mem.” She spoke in an apologetic tone, glancing at her feet; the foot off duty being lowered for the purpose of inspection, which over, she hoisted it again immediately into the recesses of the Rob Roy tartan.

“Have you a father and mother?”

“Yes, mem.”

“ What does your father do ? ”

Baubie Clark glanced down again in thought for an instant, then raised her eyes directly for the first time to her questioner's face.

“ He used to be a Christy man, but he canna be that any longer, sae he goes wi' boords.”

“ Why cannot he be a Christy man any longer ? ”

Down came the foot once more, and this time took up its position permanently beside the other. “ Because mother drinks awfu', an' she pawned the banjo for drink.” This family history was related in the most matter-of-fact natural way.

“ And does your father drink too ? ” asked Miss Mackenzie, after a short pause.

Baubie Clark's eyes wandered all round the room, and with one toe she swept up quite a little mass of dust before she answered, in a voice every tone of which spoke unwilling truthfulness—

“Just whiles ;—Saturday nictzs.”

“Is *he* kind to you ?”

“Ay,” looking up quickly ; “excep’—just whiles when he’s fou. Saturday nictzs, ye ken”—with a meaning, expressive nod—“and then he beats me ; but he’s rael kind when he’s sober.”

“Were you ever at school ?”

“No, mem,” with a shake of the head that seemed to convey that she had something else, and possibly better, to do.

“Did you ever hear of God ?” asked the lady who had brought her.

“Ay, mem,” answered Baubie quite readily ; “it’s a kind o’ a bad word I hear in the streets.”

“How old are you ?” asked both ladies simultaneously.

“Thirteen past,” replied Baubie, with a promptness that made her listeners smile, suggesting, as it did, the thought that the question had been put to her before, and

that Baubie knew well the import of her answer.

She grew more communicative now. She could not read, but all the same she knew two songs which she sang in the streets—"Twas within a Mile o' Edinburgh Toon," and "A Wee Bird cam' to oor Ha' Door;" and carried away by the thought of her own powers, she actually began to give proof of her statement by reciting one of them there and then. This, however, was stopped at once.

"Can knet too," she added, then.

"Who taught you to knit?"

"Don' know. Wis at a Sunday schuil, too."

"Oh! you were! and what did you learn there?"

Baubie Clark looked puzzled, consulted her toes in vain, and then finally gave it up.

"I should like to do something for her," observed her first friend; "it is time this street-singing came to an end."

“ She is intelligent, clearly,” said Miss MacKenzie, looking curiously at the child, whose appearance and bearing rather puzzled her. There was not a particle of the professional street-singer about Baubie Clark. The child of that species being generally clean-washed, or at least soapy, of face, with lank, shiny, and smooth-combed hair ; and usually, too, with a smug sanctimonious air of meriting a better fate. Baubie Clark’s countenance was simply filthy ; her hair was a red-brown coloured tangle that clustered all round her face as thick as moss, it was just as uncultivated ; and she looked as if she deserved a whipping, and defied it too. She was just a female arab—an arab *plus* an accomplishment,—bright, quick, and inconsequent as a sparrow, and reeking of the streets and gutters, that had been her nursery.

“ Yes,” continued the good lady, “ I must look after her.”

“ Poor little atom ! I suppose you will find out where the parents live, and send the school board officer to them ; that’s the usual thing, is it not ? I must go, Miss Mackenzie. Good-bye for to-day. And do tell me what you settle for her.”

Miss Mackenzie promised, and her friend took her departure.

“ Go and sit by the fire, Baubie Clark, for a little, and then I shall be ready to talk to you.”

Nothing loath, apparently, Baubie established herself at the end of the fender, and from that coign of vantage watched the ongoings about her with the stoicism of a Red Indian. She showed no symptom of wonder at anything, and listened to the disquisitions of Miss Mackenzie and the matron, as to the proper adjustment of parts—“bias,” “straights,” “fells,” “gathers,” “gussets,” and “seams,”—a whole new language, as it unrolled its complexities before her, with complacent indifference.

At last, all the web of cotton being cut up, the time came to go. Miss Mackenzie buttoned up her sealskin coat, and pulling on a pair of warm gloves, beckoned Baubie, who rose with alacrity.

“Where do your father and mother live?”

“Kennedy’s Lodgings, in the Grassmarket, mem.”

“I know the place,” observed Miss Mackenzie, to whom, indeed, most of these haunts were familiar. “Take me there now, Baubie.”

They set out together. Baubie trotted in front, turning her head, dog-fashion, at every corner to see if she was followed. They reached the Grassmarket at last, and close to the corner of the West Bow found an entry with the whitewashed inscription above it—“Kennedy’s Lodgings.” Baubie glanced round to see if her friend was near, then vanished upwards from her sight. Miss Mackenzie kilted her dress and began the ascent of the

stair, the steps of which, hollowed out as they were by the tread of centuries of human feet, afforded a not too safe footing.

Arrived at the third door, she found Baubie waiting for her, breathless and panting.

"It's here," she said; "the big kitchen, mem."

A long narrow passage lay before them, off which doors opened on all sides. Precipitating herself on one of those doors, Baubie Clark, who could barely reach the latch, pushed it open, giving egress to a confusion of noises which seemed to float above a smell of cooking, in which smell herrings and onions contended for the mastery.

It was a very large room, low-ceilinged, but well enough lighted by a couple of windows, which looked into a close behind. The walls had been whitewashed once upon a time, but the whitewash was almost lost to view under the decorations with which it was overlaid.

These consisted of pictures cut out of the illustrated weekly papers and milliners' books. All sorts of subjects were represented,—fashion-plates hung side by side with popular preachers and statesmen; racehorses and Roman Catholic saints, red and white draped Madonnas elbowing the "full-dress" heroines of the penny weeklies. It was a curious gallery, and a good many of the works of art had the merit of being antique. Generations of flies had emblazoned their deeds of prowess on the papers, and streaks of candle-grease bore witness to the inquiring turn of mind, attracted by the letterpress, or the artistic proclivities of Kennedy's lodgers. It was about two, the dinner-hour probably, which accounted for the presence of so many people in the room. Most, but not all, seemed to be of the wandering class. They were variously employed. Some were sitting on the truckle-beds that ran round the walls; one or two were knitting

or sewing ; a cripple was mending baskets in one of the windows ; and about the fire a group was collected superintending the operations which produced, though not unaided, the odours with which the room was reeking.

Miss Mackenzie stood for a few minutes unnoticed, apparently, looking about her at the motley crowd. Baubie, on entering the room, had raised herself for a second on tiptoe to look into a distant corner, and then, remarking to herself, half audibly, "The boords is gane," subsided, and contented herself with watching Miss Mackenzie's movements. There seemed to be no one to do the honours. There was a lull as the inmates all looked at each other for a moment hesitatingly, then they resumed their various occupations, and the stream of noise flowed on. A young woman, a sickly, livid-faced creature, rose from her place behind the door, and advancing with a halting step, said to Miss Mackenzie—

“Mistress Kennedy’s no’ in, and Clark’s oot wi’s boords.”

“I wanted to see him about this child, who was found begging in the streets to-day.”

Miss Mackenzie looked curiously at the woman, wondering if she could belong in any way to the Clark family. She was a miserable object, seemingly in the last stage of consumption.

“Eh, mem,” she answered hurriedly, lowering her voice and drawing nearer, “ye’re a guid leddy, I ken, an’ tak’ t’ lassie away oot o’ this ; the mither’s an awfu’ woman ; tak’ her away wi’ ye, or she’ll sune be as bad. She’ll be like mysel’ and the rest o’ them here.”

“I will, I will,” Miss Mackenzie said, shocked and startled, recoiling before the spirit-reeking breath of this warning spectre.

“I will, I will,” she repeated hastily. There was no use remaining any longer. She went out, beckoning to Baubie, who was busy rummaging about a bed at the top of the room.

Baubie had bethought her that it was time to take her father his dinner. So she slipped over to that corner of the big kitchen which was allotted to the Clark family, and possessed herself of a piece of a loaf which was hidden away there. As she passed by the fire she profited by the momentary abstraction of the people who were cooking, to snap up and make her own a brace of unconsidered trifles in the shape of some onions, which were lying near them. These, with the piece of bread, she concealed on her person, and then returned to Miss Mackenzie, who was now in the passage.

“Baubie, I will send some one here about you. Now don’t let me hear of you singing in the streets, or begging again. You will get into trouble if you do.”

She was descending the stairs as she spoke, and she turned round when she had reached the entry.

“You know the police will take you, Baubie.”

“ Yes, mem,” answered Baubie, duly impressed.

“ Well, now, I am going home. Stay—are you hungry ?”

Without waiting for her answer, Miss Mackenzie entered a tiny shop close by, purchased a mutton-pie, and handed it to Baubie Clark, who received it with wondering reverence. Miss Mackenzie took her way home westwards, up the Grassmarket. She turned round before leaving it by way of King’s Stables, and caught sight, as she did so, of Baubie’s frock by the entry of Kennedy’s Lodgings—a tiny morsel of colour against the shadow of the huge gray houses. She thought of the big kitchen and its occupants, and promised herself to send the school board officer to Kennedy’s Lodgings that very night.

Baubie waited till her friend was well out of sight, then she hid her mutton-pie in the same place with the onions and the piece of

bread, and started up the Grassmarket in her turn. She stopped at the first shop she passed, and bought a pennyworth of cheese. Then she made her way by the West Port to the Lothian Road, and looked up and down it anxiously in search of the walking advertisement man. He was not there, so she set off towards Princes Street, and after promenading it as far east as the Mound, she turned up into George Street, and then before long she caught sight of her father walking leisurely by the kerb-stone. Changing her step to a kind of skip, she overtook him quickly.

“Ech, lassie, I wis thinkin’ lang,” he began wearily, when he realised her apparition. Baubie did not wait for him to finish: with a peremptory nod she signified her will, and he turned round and followed her a little way down Hanover Street. There Baubie selected a flight of steps leading down to a basement store, and throwing him a look of command,

flitted down and seated herself at the bottom. It was sheltered from the cold wind, and not too much overlooked. Clark slipped the boards from about his shoulders, and following her down, laid them against the wall at the side of the basement steps, and sat down heavily beside her. He was a weakly-looking man, sandy-haired, with a depressed and shifty expression of face, not vicious, but feeble and vacillating. Baubie seemed to have the upper hand altogether; every gesture showed it. She opened the paper that was wrapped about her fragment of yellow rank cheese, laid it down on the step between them, then produced, in their order of precedence, the pie, the onions, and the bread.

“Wha gied ye that?” asked Clark, gazing at the mutton-pie.

“A leddy,” replied Baubie concisely.

“An’ they?” pointing to the onions.

A nod was all the answer; for Baubie, who was hungry, was busy breaking the piece of

loaf. Clark, with great care, divided the pie without spilling much more than half its gravy, and began on his half and the biggest onion simultaneously. Baubie ate up her share of pie, declined cheese, and attacked her onion and a great piece of crust. The crust was very tough, and, after the mutton-pie, rather dry and tasteless. Presently she laid it down in her lap, and after a few minutes' passive silence began—

“That,” nodding at the cheese, or what was left of it rather, “wis all I got—ae penny. The leddy took me up till a hoose, an’ anither ane that wis there came doon hame, and gaed in ben, an’ wis speirin’ for ye, an’ says she’ll gie me till the poliz for singin’ an’ askin’ money in t’ streets, an’ wants you to gie me till her to pit in schuil.”

She stopped, and fixed her eyes on him, watching the effect of her words. Clark laid down his bread and cheese and stared back at

her. It seemed to take some time for his brain to realise all the meaning of her pregnant speech.

“ Ay,” he said, after a while, and with an effort. “ I maun tak’ ye to Glassky, to yer aunt. Ye’ll be pit in schuil if ye’re caught.”

“ I’ll no bide,” observed Baubie, finishing off her onion with a grimace. The raw onion was indeed strong and hot, even for Baubie’s not too epicurean palate; but it had been got for nothing—a circumstance from which it derived a flavour which many people more dainty than Baubie Clark find to be extremely appetising.

“ Bide !” echoed her father; “ they’ll mak’ ye bide. Gin I hed only the banjo agen,” sighed the whilom Christy man, getting up and preparing to adjust the boards once more.

The last crumb of the loaf was done, and Baubie, refreshed, got up too.

“ When’ll ye be hame ?” she questioned

abruptly, when they had reached the top of the steps.

“ Seven. Ga way hame wi’ ye, lassie, noo. Ye didna see *her* ?” he questioned, as he walked off.

“ Na,” replied Baubie, standing still and looking about her as if to choose what way she should take.

He sighed deeply, and bent his steps back to his beat with the listless, hopeless air that seems to belong to the members of his calling.

Baubie obeyed her parent’s commands in so far as that she did go home ; but as she took Punch and Judy in her course up the Mound, and diverged as far as a football match in the Meadows, it was fully seven before Kennedy’s Lodgings saw her again.

The following morning, shortly after breakfast, Miss Mackenzie’s butler informed her that there was a child who wanted to speak with her in the hall. On going down she found Baubie Clark on the mat.

"Where is your father? and why did he not come with you?" asked Miss Mackenzie, puzzled.

"He thought shame to come an' speak wi' a fine leddy like you." This excuse, plausible enough, was uttered in a low voice, and with downcast eyes; but hardly was it pronounced than she burst out rapidly and breathlessly into what was clearly the main object of her visit, "But please, mem, he says he'll gie me to you if ye'll gie him the three shillin's to tak' the banjo oot o' the pawn."

This candid proposal rather took Miss Mackenzie's breath away. To become the owner of Baubie Clark, even at so low a price, seemed to her rather a heathenish proceeding, with a flavour of illegality about it to boot. There was a vacancy at the Home for little girls which might be made available for the little wretch without the necessity of any preliminary of this kind; and it did not occur to her that it

was a matter of any moment whether Mr. Clark continued to exercise the *rôle* of "sandwich man" or returned to his normal profession of banjo-player. Baubie was to be got hold of in any case. With the muttered adjuration of the wretched girl in Kennedy's Lodgings echoing in her ears, Miss Mackenzie determined that she should be left no longer than could be helped in that company.

"How earnest and matter of fact she was in delivering her extraordinary errand!" thought Miss Mackenzie to herself with a sort of wonder, as she met the eager gaze of Baubie Clark's eyes, looking out from beneath her tangle of hair like those of a Skye terrier.

"I will speak to your father myself, Baubie. Tell him so. To-morrow, perhaps, I may be able to see him. Tell him I mean to settle about you myself. Now go."

The least possible flicker of disappointment passed over Baubie's face. The tangled head

drooped for an instant, then she bobbed by way of adieu, and vanished.

That day and the next passed before Miss Mackenzie found it possible to pay her promised visit to Mr. Clark; and when, about eleven in the forenoon, she once more entered the big kitchen in Kennedy's Lodgings, she was greeted with the startling intelligence that the whole Clark family were in prison.

The room was as full as before. Six women were sitting in the middle of the floor teasing out an old hair mattress. There was the same atmosphere of cooking, early as it was, and the same medley of noises.

The people were different. The basket-making cripple was gone, and in his place by the window sat a big Irish beggar-woman who was keeping up a conversation with some one (a compatriot evidently) in a window of the close behind. The mistress of the house was at home this time, and she came forward.

She was a decent-looking little woman, but had rather a hard face, expressive of care and anxiety; on recognising her visitor she curtseyed.

“The Clarks, mem? Yes. They’re a’ in the poliz office.”

“All in jail!” echoed Miss Mackenzie. “Will you come outside and speak to me? There are so many people——”

“Eh, yes, mem. I’m sure ye fin’ the room cless. Eh, yes, mem, the Clarks are a’ in the lock-up.”

They were standing in the passage now. Mrs. Kennedy held the door closed by the latch, which she kept firmly grasped in her hand. It was an odd way to secure privacy for a privileged communication to fasten the door of the room upon those inside. It was very expressive, however.

“Ye see, mem,” began the landlady, “Clark’s no a very bad man, jist weak in the

heid like ; but's wife is jist something awfu', an' I could not let her bide in a decent lodgings-house. We hae to dra' the line somewhere. A dra' it low enough, but she wis far below that. Eh, she's jist terrible ! Clark has a sister in Glassky vera weel to do, an' I h'ard him say he'd gie the lassie to her if it wer'na for the wife. The day the school board gentleman wis here, she came back ; she'd been away, ye ken, and she said she'd become a t'otaller, an' so a' sed she micht stay ; but ye see, when nicht came on she an' Clark gaed out thegither, an' jist to celebrate their bein' friens again, she an' him gaed intil a public, and she got uproarious drunk, and the poliz took her up, an' she fought wi' them. Clark wis no sae bad, so they let him come hame ; but ye see he had tasted the drink, an' wanted mair, an' he hadna ony money. Ye see he'd promised the gentleman who came here that he wouldna send Baubie oot to sing again.

But he *did* send her oot then to sing for money for him, an' the poliz had been put to watch her, an' saw her beg, an' took her up to the office, an' came back here for Clark. 'An' so, before the day was dune, they were a' lockit up thegither."

Such was the story related to Miss Mackenzie. What was to be done with Baubie now? It was hardly fair that she should be sent to a reformatory among criminal children. The child had committed no crime, acting under her parent's directions as she had done ; and there was that empty bed at the Home for little girls. She determined to attend the Sheriff Court on Monday morning, and ask to be given the custody of Baubie.

When Monday morning came, ten o'clock saw Miss Mackenzie established in a seat immediately below the Sheriff's high bench. The Clarks were among the first batch tried, and made their appearance from a side door.

Mrs. Clark came first, stepping along with a resolute brazen bearing, that contrasted with her husband's timid shuffling gait. She was a gipsy-looking woman, with wandering, defiant, black eyes, and her red face had the sign-manual of guilt stamped upon it. After her came Baubie, a red-tartan-covered mite, shrinking back, and keeping as close to her father as she could. The top of her rough head and her wild brown eyes were just visible over the panel as she stared round her, taking in with composure and astuteness everything that was going on. She was greatly puzzled to account for Miss Mackenzie's presence in court, but it never entered her head to connect it in any way with herself. She was the most self-possessed of her party; for under Mrs. Clark's active brazenness there could easily be seen fear, and a certain measure of remorse, hiding themselves; while Clark seemed to be but one remove from imbecility.

The charges were read with a running commentary of bad language from Mrs. Clark as her offences were detailed. Clark blinked in a helpless pathetic way ; and Baubie, who seemed to consider herself as associated with him alone in the charge, sucked her thumb with an air of assumed indifference, and watched Miss Mackenzie furtively.

“ Guilty or not guilty ? ” asked the sheriff-clerk.

“ There’s a kin’ lady in coort,” stammered Clark, “ and she kens a’ aboot it.”

“ Guilty or not guilty ? ” reiterated the clerk ; “ this is not the time to speak.”

“ She kens it a’, and she wis to tak’ the lassie.”

“ Guilty or not guilty ? ” insisted the clerk. “ You must plead. You can say what you like afterwards.”

Clark stopped, not without an appealing look at the kind lady, and pleaded guilty

meekly. A policeman, with a scratched face, and one hand plastered up, testified to the extravagances Mrs. Clark had committed on the strength of her conversion to teetotal principles.

Baubie heard it all impassively, her face only betraying anything like keen interest while the police officer was detailing his injuries. Three months' imprisonment was the sentence on Margaret Mactear or Clark. Then Clark's sentence was pronounced—sixty days!

He and Baubie drew nearer to each other, Clark with a despairing, helpless look. Baubie's eyes looked like those of a hare taken in a gin.

Not one word had been said about her, and she had believed that she and her father were to be included in the same punishment. But she was not long left in doubt as to her fate.

“I will take the child, Sheriff,” said Miss Mackenzie, eagerly and anxiously. “I came here purposely to offer her a home in the Refuge.”

"Policeman, hand over the child to this lady at once," said the Sheriff. "Nothing could be better, Miss Mackenzie. It is very good of you to volunteer to take charge of her."

Mrs. Clark disappeared with a parting volley of blasphemy, her husband, casting, as he went, a wistful look at Miss Mackenzie, shambled fecklessly after the partner of his joys and sorrows, and the child remained alone behind. The policeman took her by one arm and drew her forward to make room for a fresh consignment of wickedness from the cells at the side. Baubie breathed one short sigh, then shook back her hair, and looked up at Miss Mackenzie, as if to announce her readiness and goodwill. Not one vestige of her internal mental attitude could be gathered from her sun-and-wind-beaten little countenance. There was no rebelliousness, neither was there guile. One would almost have thought she had been told

beforehand what was to happen, so cool and collected was she.

“ Now, Baubie, I am going to take you home. Come, child.”

Pleased with her success, Miss Mackenzie, so speaking, took the little waif’s hand and led her out of the police court into the High Street. She hardly dared to conjecture that it was Baubie Clark’s first visit to that place ; but as she stood for a moment on the steps of the court, and shook out her skirts with a feeling of relief, she breathed a sincere hope that it might be the child’s last.

A cab was waiting. Baubie, to her intense delight and no less astonishment, was requested to occupy the front seat. Miss Mackenzie gave the driver his order and got in, facing the red tartan bundle.

“ Were you ever in a cab before ?” asked Miss Mackenzie.

“ Na, niver,” replied Baubie in a rapt tone,

and without looking at her questioner, so intent was she on staring out of the windows, between both of which she divided her attention impartially.

They were driving down the Mound, and the outlook, usually so far-reaching from that vantage-ground, was bounded by a thick sea fog that the east wind was carrying up from the Forth, and dispensing with lavish hands on all sides. The buildings had a grim black look, as if a premature old age had come upon them, and the dark pinnacles of the Monument stood out sharply defined, in clear-cut harsh distinctness, against the floating gray background. There were not many people stirring in the streets. It was a depressing atmosphere, and Miss Mackenzie observed before long that Baubie seemed either to have become influenced by it, or that the novelty of the cab-ride had worn off completely. They crossed at Stockbridge the Water of Leith, worn to a mere

brown thread owing to the long drought, and a few yards more brought them to their destination—a gray stone house, separated from the street by a grass plot enclosed by a stone wall. Inside the wall grew chestnut and poplar trees, which in summer must have shaded the place agreeably, but which this day in the cold gray mist, made with their black network of branches but a sombre framing for it. The gate was opened from within by a lifter as soon as Miss Mackenzie rang, and she and Baubie walked up the little flagged path together. As the gate clanged to behind them, Baubie looked back involuntarily and sighed.

“Don’t fear, lassie,” said her guide, “they will be very kind to you here. And it will be just a good home for you.”

It may be questioned whether this promise of a good home awoke any pleasing associations, or carried with it any definite meaning to Baubie Clark’s mind. She glanced up as if

to show that she understood, but her eyes turned then, and rested on the square front of the little old-fashioned gray house, with its six staring windows, and its front circumscribed by the black poplars and naked chestnuts, and she choked down another sigh.

“Now, Mrs. Duncan,” Miss Mackenzie was saying to a comfortably-dressed elderly woman, “here is your new girl, Baubie Clark.”

“Eh, ye’ve been successful then, Miss Mackenzie?”

“Oh dear, yes; the Sheriff made no objection. And now, Mrs. Duncan, I hope she will be a good girl, and give you no trouble. Come here, Baubie, and promise me to do everything you are told, and obey Mrs. Duncan in everything.”

“Yes, mem,” answered Baubie reverently, almost solemnly. There seemed to be no necessity for further exhortations. Baubie’s demeanour promised everything that was hoped

for or wanted ; and, perfectly contented, Miss Mackenzie turned her attention to the minor details of her wardrobe.

“ That frock is good enough if it were washed. She must get shoes and stockings ; and then underwear, too, of some sort will be wanted.”

“ That will it,” responded the matron ; “ but I had better send her at once to get a bath.”

A tall, yellow-haired girl was summoned from a back room, and desired to get ready a tub. It was the ceremony customary at the reception of a neophyte ;—customary, and, in general, very necessary too.

Baubie’s countenance fell lower still on hearing this, and she blinked both eyes deprecatingly. Nevertheless when the big girl, whom they called Kate, returned, bringing with her a warm whiff suggestive of steam and soap, she trotted after her obediently and silently.

After a while the door opened, and Kate's yellow head appeared.

"Speak with ye, mem?" she said. "I have her washen noo, but what for claes?"

"Eh, yes, Miss Mackenzie, we can't put her back into those dirty clothes."

"Oh no, I'll come and look at her clothes, Kate." As she spoke, Miss Mackenzie rose and followed the matron and Kate into a sort of kitchen or laundry.

In the middle of the floor was a tub containing Miss Clark mid - deep in soap - suds. Her thick hair was all soaking, and clung fast to her head; dripping locks hung down over her eyes, which looked out from below the tangle, patient and suffering. She glanced up quickly as Miss Mackenzie came in, and then resigned herself passively into Kate's hands, who, with a piece of flannel, had resumed the scrubbing process.

Miss Mackenzie was thinking to herself

that it was possibly Baubie Clark's first experience of the kind, when she observed the child wince as if she were hurt.

"It's yon as hurts her," said Kate, calling the matron's attention to something on the child's shoulders. They both stooped and saw a long blue and red mark—a bruise all across her back. Nor was this the only evidence of ill-treatment; other bruises, and even scars, were to be seen on the lean little body.

"Puir thing," said the matron in a low tone, sympathisingly.

"Baubie, who gave you that bruise?" asked Miss Mackenzie.

No answer from Baubie, who seemed to be absorbed in watching the drops running off the end of her little red nose, which played the part of a gargoyle to the rest of her face.

Miss Mackenzie repeated the question, sternly almost. "Baubie Clark, I insist upon knowing who gave you that bruise."

"A didna gie't to myself, mem," was the answer from the figure in the tub. There was a half sob in the voice as if of terror, and her manner at least had all the appearance of ingenuousness.

"Od!" said Kate, who had paused in the act of taking a warm towel from the fireplace to listen, "a body kens ye didna gie it til yersel', lassie."

The matron and Miss Mackenzie looked at each other. There was no use in pushing the question further, that was plain.

"Where are her clothes?" said the matron, prudently turning the subject. "Oh, here. Yon frock's good enough, if it was washed; but, losh me! just look at these for clothes!" She was exhibiting some indescribable rags as she spoke.

"Kate, dress her in the lassie Grant's clothes; they are the most likely to fit her. Don't lose time. I want to see her again before I go."

Kate fished up her charge, all smoking, from the soap-suds, and rubbed her down before the fire. Then the tangled wet hair was parted evenly, and smoothed into dank locks on either side of her face. Raiment clean, but the coarsest of the coarse, was found for her. A brown wincey dress surmounted all. Shoes and stockings came last of all, that being probably the order of importance assigned to them by Kate.

From the arm-chair of the matron's sitting-room, Miss Mackenzie surveyed her charge with satisfaction. Baubie looked subdued, contented, perhaps grateful, and was decidedly uncomfortable. Every vestige of the picturesque was gone—obliterated clean by soap and water; and Kate's hair-comb, a broken-toothed weapon that had come off second best in its periodic conflicts with her own barley-mow, had disposed for ever of the wild curly tangle of hair. Her eyes had

red rims to them, caused by an over-zealous application of soap and water; yet in its present barked condition, when all the dirt was gone, Baubie's face had rather an interesting, wistful expression. She seemed not to stand very steadily in her boots, which were much too big for her.

Miss Mackenzie surveyed her with great satisfaction, the brown wincey and the coarse apron seemed to her the neophyte's robe betokening Baubie's conversion from arab nomadism to respectability, and from a vagabond trade to decorous industry.

“Now, Baubie, you can knit. I mean to give you needles and worsted to knit yourself stockings. Won't that be nice? I am sure you never knitted stockings for yourself before.”

“Yes, mem,” replied Baubie, shuffling her feet.

“Now, what bed is she to get, Mrs. Duncan? Let us go upstairs and see the dormitory.”

"I thought I would put her in the room with Kate. I changed the small bed in there. If you will just step upstairs, Miss Mackenzie."

The party reached the dormitory by a narrow wooden staircase, the whiteness of which testified to the scrubbing powers of Kate's red arms and those of her compeers. All the windows were open, and the east wind came in at its will, nippingly cold, if airy. They passed through a large low-ceilinged room into a smaller one, in which were only four beds; a small iron stretcher beside the window was pointed out as Baubie's. Miss Mackenzie turned down the red knitted coverlet, and looked at the blankets. They were perfectly clean, like everything else; and, like everything else, too, very coarse and very well worn.

"This will do very nicely. Baubie, this is to be your bed."

Baubie, fresh from the lock-up and Kennedy's

Lodgings, might have been expected to show some trace of her sense of comparison ; but not a vestige of expression crossed her face : she looked up in civil acknowledgment of having heard. That was all.

“I shall look in again in the course of a week,” pronounced Miss Mackenzie. “Good-bye, Baubie ; do everything Mrs. Duncan tells you.”

With this valedictory Miss Mackenzie left the dormitory. The matron and Kate attended her downstairs ; and Baubie was at last alone.

She remained standing stock-still where they left her by the bedside, when the door, shut by Kate, who went out last, hid them from her view. She listened in a stupid kind of way to the feet tramping on the bare boards of the outer dormitory, and down the stairs, then all was still ; and Baubie Clark, clean, clothed, and separated from her father for the first time in her life, was left alone to

consider how she liked "school." She felt cold and strange and lonely, and for about three minutes' space she abandoned herself without reserve to the sensation. Then the heavy shoes troubled her, and with a fit of anger and impatience she suddenly began to unlace one. Some far-off sound startled her, and with a furtive timorous look at the door, she fastened it up again. No one came; but instead of returning to the boot, she sprang to the window, and mounting the narrow sill, prepared to survey the domain that lay below it. There was not much to see. The window looked out on the back-green, which was very much like the front, save that there was no flagged walk. A few stunted poplars ran round the walls; the grass was trodden nearly all off, and from wall to wall were stretched cords from which fluttered a motley collection of linen hung out to dry. There was no looking out of it. Baubie craned her adventurous

small neck in all directions. One side of the back-green was overlooked by a tall tenement ; the other was guarded by the poplars and a low stone wall ; at the bottom was a dilapidated outhouse. The sky overhead was all dull gray ; a thin shapeless sea-mist hurried across it, driven by the east wind, which found time as well to fill, as it passed, all the fluttering garments on the line, and swell them into droll travesties of the bodies they belonged to, tossing them the while with high mockery into all manner of weird contortions.

Baubie looked at them curiously, and wondered to herself how much they would all pawn for—considerably more than three shillings, no doubt. She established that fact in her own mind ere long, though she was not much of an arithmetician, and sighed as she built and demolished an air-castle. Though there was but little attraction for her in the room, she was about to leave the window

when her eye fell on a large black cat crouched on the wall, employed, whether in surveillance of the linen, or stalking sparrows, or in deadly ambush for a hated rival. Meeting Baubie's glance, he sat up and stared at her suspiciously with a pair of round, yellow, unwinking orbs.

“Tsheet! tsheet! tsheet!” breathed Baubie discreetly. She felt lonely, and the cat looked a comfortable big creature, and belonged to the house doubtless, for he stared at her with an interested questioning look. Presently he moved. She repeated her invitation, whereon the cat slowly rose to his feet, humped his back and yawned, then deliberately turned quite round, facing the other way, and resumed his watchful attitude, his tail tucked in and his ears folded back close, as if to give the cold wind as little purchase as possible. Baubie felt snubbed and lonely, and drawing back from the window, she sat down on the edge of her bed to wait events.

Accustomed as she was to excitement, the experiences of the last few days were of a nature to affect even stronger nerves than hers; and the unwonted bodily sensations, caused by the bath and change of apparel, seemed to intensify her consciousness of novelty and restraint. There was another not very pleasant sensation, too, of which she herself had not taken account, although it was present and made itself felt keenly enough. It was her strange sense of desolation and grief at the parting from her father. Baubie herself would have been greatly puzzled had any person designated her feelings by these names. There were many things in that philosophy of the gutter in which Baubie Clark was steeped to the lips that were undreamt of by her. What she knew, she knew thoroughly; but there was much with which most children, even of her age and class in life, are, it is to be hoped, familiar, of which

Baubie Clark was soundly ignorant. Her circumstances were different from theirs—fortunately for them ; and amongst the poor, as with their betters, various conditions breed various dispositions. Baubie was an outer barbarian and savage in comparison with some children, although they perhaps went barefooted also ; but like a savage, too, she would have grown fat where they would have starved. And this she knew well.

Kate's yellow head appearing at the door to summon her to dinner put an end to her gloomy reverie. And with this, her first meal, began Baubie's acquaintance with the household—an integral portion of which she was to form from that hour.

They gave her no house-work to do. Mrs. Duncan, whom a very cursory examination satisfied as to the benighted ignorance of this latest addition to her flock, determined that Baubie should learn to read, write, and sew, as

expeditiously as might be. In order that she might benefit by example, she was made to sit by the lassie Grant, the child whose clothes had been lent to her—and her education began forthwith.

It was tame work to Baubie, who did not love sitting still; “white seam” was a vexation of spirit; and her knitting, in which she had beforehand believed herself an adept, was found fault with. The lassie Grant, as was pointed out to her, could knit more evenly, and possessed a superior method of “turning the heel.”

Baubie Clark listened with outward calmness and seeming acquiescence to the comparison instituted between herself and her neighbour. Inwardly, however, she raged. What about knitting? anybody could knit. She would like to see the lassie Grant earn two shillings of a Saturday night singing in the High Street or the Lawnmarket. Baubie

forgot in her flush of triumphant recollection that there had been always somebody to take the two shillings from her, and beat her, and accuse her of malversation and embezzlement into the bargain. Artist-like, she remembered only her triumphs ; she could earn two shillings by her brace of songs, and for a minute, as she revelled in this proud consciousness, her face lost its demure watchful expression, and the old independent confident bearing reappeared. Baubie forgot also in her present well-nourished condition the never-failing sensation of hunger that had gone hand in hand with these departed glories.

Her being well fed simply entailed as a consequence that her mind was freed from what is, after all, the besetting occupation of creatures like her, and was therefore free to bestow its undivided attention upon the restraints and irksomeness of this new order of things. Her gipsy blood stirred again, and

her vagabond habits began to assert themselves under the wincey frock and clean apron. To be commended for knitting and sewing was no distinction worth talking about. What was it compared with standing where the full glare of the blazing windows of some public-house fell upon the Rob Roy tartan, with an admiring audience gathered round, and bawbees and commendations flying thick ? She never thought then, any more than now, of the cold, the wind, the day-long hunger, or the probable beating. It was no wonder that under the influence of these cherished recollections "white seam" did not progress, and the knitting never attained the finished evenness of the lassie Grant's performance.

None the less, although she made no honest effort to equal this model proposed for her example, did Baubie feel jealous and aggrieved. Her nature recognised other possibilities of expression, and other fields of excellence, be-

yond those afforded by the above-mentioned useful arts, and she brooded over her arbitrary and forcedly inferior position with all the intensity of a naturally masterful and passionate nature. It was all the more unbearable because she had no real cause of complaint ; had she been oppressed or ill-treated in the slightest degree, or had anybody else been unduly favoured, there would have been a pretext for an outbreak or a shadow of a reason for her discontent. But it was not so. The matron dispensed even-handed justice and motherly kindness impartially all round. And if the lassie Grant's excellences were somewhat obtrusively contrasted with Baubie's shortcomings, it was because the two children being of the same age, Mrs. Duncan hoped to raise thereby a spark of emulation in Baubie. Neither was there any Pharisaical self-exaltation on the part of the rival. She was a sandy-haired little girl, an orphan, who had

been three years in the Refuge, and who, in her own mind, rather deprecated as unfair any comparison drawn between herself and the newly-caught Baubie.

Day followed day quietly, and Baubie had been just a week in the Refuge when Miss Mackenzie, faithful to her promise, called to inquire how her *protégée* was getting on.

The matron gave her rather a good character of Baubie. "She's just no trouble; a quiet-like child; she knows just nothing; but I've set her beside the lassie Grant, and I don't doubt but she'll do well yet; but she is some slow," she added.

"Are you happy, Baubie?" asked Miss Mackenzie. "Will you try and learn everything like 'Lisbeth Grant? See how well she sews, and she is no older than you."

"Ay, mem," responded Baubie meekly, and without looking up. She was still wearing 'Lisbeth Grant's frock and apron, and the gar-

ments gave her that odd look of their real owner which clothes so often have the power of conveying. Baubie's slim figure had caught the flat-backed, square-shouldered shape of her little neighbour; and her face, between the smooth-laid bands of her hair, seemed to have assumed the same gravely respectable air. The disingenuous roving eye was there all the time, could they but have noted it, and gave the lie to her compressed lips and studied pose.

That same day the Rob Roy tartan frock made its appearance from the wash, brighter as to hue, but somewhat smaller and shrunken in size, as was the nature of its material, for one reason; and for another, because it had parted, in common with its owner when subjected to the same process, with a great deal of extraneous matter. Baubie saw her familiar garb again with joy, and put it on with keen satisfaction.

That same night, when the girls were going to bed—whether the inspiration still lingered, in spite of soap-suds, about the red frock, and was by it imparted to its owner, or whether it was merely the promptings of that demon of self-assertion who had been tormenting her of late—Baubie Clark volunteered a song, and struck up one of the two which formed her stock-in-trade.

The unfamiliar sounds had not long disturbed the quiet of the house when the matron and Kate, open-eyed with wonder, hastened up to know what was the meaning of this departure from the regular order of things. Baubie heard their approach, and only sang the louder. She had a good and by no means unmusical voice, which the rest had rather improved ; she enunciated every word distinctly ; they could hear her as they came up the stairs—

“ A wee bird cam’ to oor ha’ door ;
He warbled sweet and clearly ;

And aye the owercome o' his sang
Was, wae's me for Prince Charlie !
Oh ! when I heard the bonnie bonnie bird
The tears cam' drappin' rarely"—

by this time the authorities had arrived on the scene, to find an audience gathered round the daring artist, who, shoes and stockings off, and the Rob Roy tartan half unfastened, was standing by her bed, singing at the pitch of her voice.

“ Baubie Clark !” cried the astonished mistress, “ what do you mean ?”

“ I took my bannet aff my head,
For weel I lo'ed Prince Charlie ”—

sang Baubie deliberately. She was just at the close of her verse, and finished off, her bright eyes and flushed face turned towards the speaker.

“ Who gave you leave, Baubie Clark,” went on the angry matron, “ to make yon noise ? You ought to think shame of such conduct, singing your good-for-nothing street songs, like a tinkler. One would think ye would feel

glad never to hear of such things again. Let me hear no more of this, do you hear? I just wonder what Miss Mackenzie would say to ye! Kate, stop here till they are all bedded, and turn off yon gas."

Long before the gas was extinguished Baubie had retired into darkness beneath the bed-clothes, rage and mortification swelling her small heart. Good-for-nothing street songs! Tinkler! Mrs. Duncan's scornful epithets rang in her ears, and cut her to the quick. She lay awake, trembling with anger and indignation, until long after Kate had followed the younger fry to rest, and their regular breathing, which her ears listened for till they caught from every bed, warned her that their weary occupants were safely asleep; then she sat up in bed. The moonlight streamed into the room through the uncurtained window, and lit up her tumbled head and hot face. After a cautious pause, she

stepped out on the floor, and went round the foot of her bed to the window ; she knelt down on the floor as if she were in search of something, and began feeling with her hand on the lower part of the shutter ; then, close to the floor, and in a place where they were likely to escape detection, she marked clearly and distinctly eight deep short scratches in an even line on the yellow-painted woodwork. She ran her fingers over them until she could feel each scratch distinctly. Eight ! She counted them thrice to make sure, then jumped back into bed, and in a few minutes was as fast asleep as her neighbours.

The days wore into weeks, and the weeks had soon made a month ; and time, as it went, left Baubie more demure, quieter, and more diligent. Diligent, apparently at least—for the knitting, though it advanced, showed no sign of corresponding improvement, and the rest of her work was simply scamped. March

had given way to April, and the late Edinburgh spring at last began to give signs of its approach. The chestnut showed brown glistening tips to their branch ends, and their black trunks became covered with a fresh emerald-coloured mildew. The rod-like branches of the poplars turned a pale-green, and their knots began to thicken. The Water of Leith, swelled with the spring rains, overflowed, and ran bubbling and mud-coloured under the bridge ; and the grass by its banks, and even that in the front green of the Refuge, showed here and there a red-eyed daisy. The days grew longer and longer, and of a mild evening the thrush's note was to be heard above the brawling of the stream from the thickets of Dean Terrace Gardens.

Baubie Clark waited passively. Every day saw her more docile and demure, and every day saw a new scratch added to her tally on the window-shutter behind her bed.

May came, and the days climbed with longer strides to their goal, now close, on reaching which they return slowly and unwillingly, but just as surely; and to her joy, about the third week in May, Baubie Clark counted, one warm summer night, fifty-nine scratches on the shutter. Fifty-nine! She knew the number well without counting them, and yet she counted them over and over again with an elfish glee by herself in the half-light.

Whether she slept or watched that night is not known, but the next morning at four saw Baubie make a hasty and rather more simple toilet than usual, insomuch as she forgot to wash herself, brush her hair, or put on her shoes and stockings. Barefooted and bare-headed, much as she had come, she went. She stole noiselessly as a shadow through the outer dormitory, passing the rows of sleepers with bated breath, and not without a parting glance of triumph at the bed where her rival,

Elizabeth Grant, was curled up. Down the wooden stair, her bare feet waking no echoes, glided Baubie, and into the schoolroom, which looked out on the front green. She opened the window easily, hoisted herself on the sill, crept through, and let herself drop on the grass below. To scramble up the trunk of one of the chestnuts and swing herself over the wall was quickly done, and there she was once more in the street, and the world lay before her.

As she stood for one moment, breathless with her haste and excitement, she was startled by the sudden apparition of the house cat, who was on his way home as surreptitiously as she was on hers abroad. He had one bloody ear and a scratched nose, and stared at her as he passed ; then, probably in the hope of finding a door left open after her, he bounced over the wall hurriedly. Baubie was seized with a sudden panic lest the cat should waken some one in the house, and she

took to her heels and ran until she reached the bridge. The sun was just beginning to touch the tall tops of the houses, and the little valley through which the Water of Leith ran lay still in a kind of clear grayish light in which the pale tender hues of the young leaves and the flowering trees were all the more vividly beautiful. The stream was low, and it hurried along over its stony bed as if it too were running away, and in as great a hurry to be free of all restraints as truant Baubie Clark, whose red frock was now climbing the hilly gray street beyond. She could hear, as she strained herself to listen for pursuing voices, the babble and murmur of the water with an odd distinctness as it rose upon the still air of the summer morning.

Not a creature was to be seen as she made her way eastwards, shaping her course for Princes Street, and peering, with a gruesome fear of the school board officer, round every

corner. That early bird, however, was not so keenly on the alert as she gave him the credit of being, and she reached her goal unchallenged, after coasting along in parallel lines with it for some time. .

The long beautiful line of Princes Street was untenanted as the Rob Roy tartan tacked cautiously round the corner of St. David Street, and took a hasty look up and down before venturing forth.

The far-reaching pale-red beams of the morning sun had just touched and kindled as with a flame the summit of the rock, and the windows of the Castle caught and flashed back the greeting in a dozen ruddy reflections. The Gardens below lay partly veiled in a clear transparent mist, faintly blue, that hovered above the trees and crept up the banks, and over which the grand outlines of the rock towered as it lifted its head majestically into the gold halo that lay beyond.

Not a sound nor stir, even the sparrows were barely awake, as Baubie darted along. Fixing her eye on that portion of the Calton Hill which is visible from Princes Street, she pushed forward at a pace that was almost a run, and a brief space saw her draw up and fall exhausted on the steps that lead up to its wooded slopes.

Right before her was the jail gate.

The child's feet, unused now for some time to such hardships, were hot and bruised, for she had not stopped to pick her footing in her hasty course, and she was so out of breath and heated that it seemed to her as if she would never get cool, or her heart cease fluttering as if it would choke her. She shrank herself discreetly against the stone wall at her side, and there for three long hours she remained crouched, watching and waiting for the hour to chime when the grim black gate opposite might open.

The last tinge of crimson and purple had faded before the golden glories of the day, as the sun climbed higher and higher in the serene blue sky. The red pile of Salisbury Crags glared with a hot lustre above the green slopes of the hill, and in the soft white dust of the highroad a million tiny stars seemed to sparkle and twinkle to Baubie Clark's eyes. The birds had long been awake and busy in the bushes above her head, and from where she sat she could see, in the distant glitter of Princes Street, all the stir of the newly-roused day.

It was a long vigil, and her fear and impatience made it seem doubly longer. A thousand fears and doubts took possession of Baubie, and so wrought upon her that she even counted the striking of the clocks wrong; but she never relaxed her watch for an instant. At last the clock began to chime eight o'clock. and before it was half done the wicket in the

great door opened with a noisy clang after a preliminary rattle.

First came a boy,—he cast an anxious look round him, then set off at a run; next a young woman, for whom another was waiting just out of sight down the road. And then Baubie, whose heart was beginning to beat fast again with anxiety, saw the familiar, well-known figure shamble forth, and look up and down the road in a helpless, undecided way. He came the last. The next moment the wicket had clapped to again. Clark glanced back at it, sighed once or twice, and blinked his eyes as though the sunlight were too strong for them.

Baubie, scarce breathing, watched him as a cat watches just before she springs.

After a second of hesitation he began to move cityward, obeying some sheep-like instinct which impelled him to follow those who had gone on before. Baubie saw this, and just

waiting to let him get well under way and settle into his gait, she gathered herself up and pounced across the road upon him with the suddenness and rapidity of a flash.

He fairly staggered with surprise. There she was, exactly as he had left her, dusty, barefooted, and bareheaded. The wind had tossed up her hair, which was only too obedient to its will, and it clustered all the more wildly about her face because of having been cropped to the regulation length of the Refuge.

“Lassie, is ’t you !” he ejaculated, lost in astonishment. Then realising the fact, he gave expression to his feelings by grinning in a convulsive kind of way, and clapping her once or twice on the shoulder next him.

“Od ! I niver ! Didna the leddy——”

Baubie cut him short. “Sed I wudna bide,” she observed curtly and significantly.

Gestures and looks convey, among people like the Clarks, far more meaning than words,

and Baubie's father perfectly understood from the manner and tone of her pregnant remark, that she had run away from school, and had severed the connection between herself and the "kind leddy," and that in consequence the situation was highly risky for both. They remained standing still for a moment, looking at each other. The boy and the woman were already out of sight, and the white dusty high-road seemed all their own domain.

Clark shuffled with his feet once more, and looked in the direction of Princes Street, and then at Baubie inquiringly. It was for her as usual to decide. Baubie had been his providence for as long as he had memory for—no great length of time. He was conjecturing now vaguely in his mind whether his providence had by any chance got the desiderated three shillings necessary to the redemption of the banjo, hidden away in the Rob Roy tartan. He would not have been surprised had it

been so, and he would have asked no questions.

Seeing that her eyes followed the direction of his with a forbidding frown, he said tentatively,

“Ye didn’—didna,” he shuffled—

“What!” snapped Baubie, crossly; she divined his meaning exactly. “Come’ awa’ wi’ ye,” she ordered, facing right round countrywards.

“We’ll gae wa till Glassky, Baubie,” he said, falling in with her humour at once, “eh? I’m thinkin’, to yer auntie’s. *She*”—with a gesture of his head backwards at the prison—“will no’ be oot this month, sae she’ll niver need to ken, eh?”

Baubie nodded. He only spoke her own thoughts, and he knew it.

The first turn to the right past the High School brought them out on the road before Holyrood, which lay grim and black under the

sun-bathed steeps of Arthur's Seat. On by the Grange, and all round the south-eastern portion of the city, this odd couple took their way. It was a long round, but safety made it necessary. It was mid-day when, between Corstorphine's wooded slopes and the steeper rise of the Pentlands, they struck into the Glasgow road. In the same order as before, they pursued their journey, Baubie leading as of old, now and again vouchsafing a word over her shoulder to her obedient follower, until at last the dim haze of the horizon received into itself the two quaint figures, and Baubie Clark and the Rob Roy tartan faded together out of sight.



WEEDS



WEEDESS.

It was Friday, the market-day at Galteetown, the hottest and sleepiest of August afternoons —the first Friday in August, with all the heat and venom of July in it, but with not a chance of the thunder-showers that drench and cool the fierce temper of the dog-days. It had been a crowded market-day, and though the press of business was now nearly over, the steam and dust that hung about was enough to make one envy the swallows as they soared overhead in the clear sunlight, giving the square of Galteetown a wide berth. The donkeys, of whom there were some hundreds, stood patiently resigned to flies and drought, waiting the leisure of their mis-

tresses, whose white caps were visible in the semi-darkness of the shops as they made their weekly purchases before the start homewards. The sales were nearly all concluded, the hens and ducks had been all transferred from their original owners to the "dealers," in whose crates they were now thrust sorely against their will, as testified by their lamentations. The "eggliers" were busy getting ready their huge packing-cases for the road, sorting ducks' eggs from hens' eggs, and ranging each kind in its layer of straw. The fish-cart which came every Friday from Waterford was emptied of its stock of spent cod and hake, and its owner was using all his eloquence to rid himself of a most odorous parcel of salted mackerel at the rate of fourpence per dozen, an abatement of twopence upon their morning price. The rag-merchant, who was also a second-hand clothes dealer, had packed and tied up one donkey-load, and smoked lazily as he watched a

couple of girls finger the odd lengths of coloured cottons and stuffs which, with queer old gowns and faded shawls, the cast-offs probably of English peasants, formed his stock-in-trade. The drowsiness begotten of sun-heat and long exertion had rather dulled the ardours of commerce, which, in its primitive form of barter, had but a few hours before rivalled in hot intensity the noon-tide fever of the Stock Exchange. The flies buzzed sleepily around the fish-cart, and pestered the unhappy donkeys at their will, for the creatures were too wearied and sleepy to move an ear or tail in protestation. There was a drinking fountain in the middle of the square, a round iron trough, placed unfortunately too high for the accommodation of animals of the four-footed species. This was furnished with a half-dozen faucets, which could be turned on at will, and drinking cups. It was visited almost every minute by the market people, but no one

thought of filling a bucket for the poor, patient brutes. It was nearly time to start for home ; half-a-dozen carts were already climbing the hilly road that led from Galteetown towards the Waterford mountains. Some others were taking their way by the Dublin and Tipperary roads, but the crowd was scarcely diminished. At the first glance it seemed a mere assemblage of people without any appreciable central or rallying point ; but a closer inspection showed that near the fountain and in front of the hotel, as the leading public-house of the town was called, was a part of the square where the leading dealers and their customers most resorted. Blaney's fish-cart was always drawn up there, and the pedlars' carts of old clothes and rags. The tin-ware merchant and the dealer in wicker baskets and dishes were seldom far off, and to the right and left of them stood, as if by right, the ass carts of the most considerable

frequenter of the place. It was the hottest spot in the town that afternoon, and the hot sun drew out all the varied odours, salt-fish vying among them with the omnipresent turf-smoke in which the clothes of the country people seem to be soaked. Blaney's garron had been taken out of the fish-cart and tied to the back of the next cart, which belonged to a Mrs. Roche, a farmer's wife from the mountain district. Mrs. Roche was eating a piece of dry bread. She could very well afford to eat her own butter if she chose, and she did when at home, but it is not wise to be luxurious in public, and that commodity was now, owing to a spell of dry weather, fetching too good a price to be wasted within sight of the neighbours. As she leaned against the wheel of her cart and bit at the tough bread, she was talking to a changing group of women on the other side of the vehicle. The centre figure of this group was a stout woman of about

sixty, who had a black shawl folded over her head instead of a white frilled cap like the rest of the women. She also wore silver-rimmed spectacles, and it was easy to see from her manner, and the deferential address of the others, that she was a person of some importance. She was, in fact, the parish priest's housekeeper, the leading gossip of the town, and its great oracle upon all matters of intelligence. Between her head-gear and her dress, which was of thick black stuff, she had a quasi look of some kind of religious. She had on a white apron, but that badge of servitude was twisted up so as to be out of sight. She was busy purchasing fowls for her master, feeling the breast-bones and pinching the thighs of the struggling chickens, and declaiming loudly the while as to their shortcomings.

“ You can say what you like, Mrs. Murphy ” —she was talking to an old woman who was

standing a little apart from the group. "You can!" repeated the priest's housekeeper, "but your chickens are dear—five shillings for that half-dozen is expensive, ma'am. Mrs. Ready beyand got four good young cocks for half-a-crown this morning that were better fed than yours—much fuller."

"Oh, ma'am," replied Mrs. Murphy, "it is of no use your telling me. I would rather take my little chickens home again—so I would."

"Very well, then, for me," returned the housekeeper, letting the chicken fall from her hands without more ado, as she addressed herself to another of the group. "The butter is to be had good at Bowles' shop beyont for ninepence, so I will not trouble you to leave it with me for elevenpence," went on the housekeeper in a tone of dignified irony. Then, dropping her voice discreetly into the frills of a cap close by, "I would not, thin, be the per-

son that would tell the Cliffords, Lawder, the agent, is bringing home his new wife to-night, eh, Mrs. Ahearne ? ”

“ To-night, thin ! ” echoed Mrs. Ahearne, a stout, red-faced woman of about forty. “ And it is to-night ! It was this day fortnight they was married ! Oh, good God, den —get married on Friday and come home on Friday ! Saints be about us, but I would not be in Lawder’s shoes when Charley Clifford sees—— ”

A violent push from a neighbour made her look round suddenly and stop. The fish dealer Blaney was harnessing his horse, and a big constabulary man was standing close by, talking to him.

“ Lawder is a devil—so he is indeed, my God ! ” whined a little stooped old woman, whose face between sunburn and wrinkles resembled nothing so much as a baked potato. “ Look at us served with the process to

quit come Michaelmas. And it was my boy's grandfather built the house over our heads—dere above on Sheena Rinkey, and carried de lime up dat mountain on his back dere too. Forty years I am sleeping in dat house now, and I never can sleep in any other house. No ! I will die ! And dere is my son James comin' home next week, can get no work in England—an' we all to be put out. An' look at me, dat used always to have my own side car to go to mass on, and dat brought the Heffernans a hundred pounds fortune and two of the finest heifers you ever laid eyes upon, and not to mention a feather-bed that it took four of us to haul into the house. And look at me now, has to be beholden to a neighbour to lift me down on her little ass-cart, or I never could get to the market at all. Oh dear ! oh dear ! if my good people, the Brophys, could see my state this day ! ” And she put her apron corner to her eye and cried aloud.

“Is this Mary—Mary—?” said the priest’s housekeeper, hesitating for the name. She knew it perfectly well; it was only one of her ways of being dignified, to pretend not to know poor people.

“Mary Brophy is my name, ma’am,” answered the little woman through her sobs; “but Heffernan they do be calling me.” She had been married to Con Heffernan for forty years, but with the old tribal instinct that yet obtains among the Irish of her class, counted herself among the Brophys still. She half curtseyed, as she spoke, with the tears running down her nose, to the priest’s housekeeper, who surveyed her coolly through her silver-rimmed spectacles. They were a cast pair of her master’s, and fitted the bridge of her nose exactly; if they suited her eyesight as well may be matter of conjecture.

“What did you get for your chickens this day?” asked she.

“Fifteenpence for three, ma’am,” replied Mary Heffernan. “I sold them to the bank manager there below, and,” dropping her voice, “he’s such a naygur he would not give me the eighteenpence.”

“Ay, ay, ay,” joined all the other white caps in chorus. “That’s the way wi’ *them* always.”

They knew, as well as the speaker, that the chickens had been offered to the same bank manager at a penny each below market price, for the simple reason that Con Heffernan was endeavouring to get him to renew a bill for thirty pounds for another six months, and his wife thought to propitiate him thus. The thirty pounds had gone to the landlord in part, the other part had bought Indian meal, and a few pounds remained, and would perhaps stave off eviction this time, and the workhouse. There had been two bad years. The married son, with whom they lived, had

found but half the usual employment in England ; his wife had gone out to service ; and, what was worse than of all, there had been hard times in America, and the daughters in New York, on whose earnings the Heffernans mainly depended, had not been able to send home any money. A respite of another six months made sure of—— Who could tell what miracle, agricultural or political, might not take place in the time ?

“ I am told,” said Mrs. Ahearne, fixing her eyes on the housekeeper’s face, “ that Lawder has got four thousand with this new wife of his.”

“ Four,” assented the housekeeper, “ it is quite true ; but then,” she went on in a bitter, gibing voice, “ Lawder, you know, is a strong man himself ; he makes up to a thousand a year out of this place, so he does. Not but what he came here bare enough.”

A silence fell upon the group ; their eyes were all turned upon each other’s faces.

“Four thousan’!” repeated Mary Brophy or Heffernan, as blankly as if they had said four millions. It was a sum just as far beyond her calculations.

“Four!” sneered Mrs. Ahearne. “He’ll be able to pay down money now, and send off poor Mary Clifford——”

A hand was suddenly laid across her mouth by another member of the group, but not in time. Mrs. Roche, who had been listening while she ate her piece of bread at the back of the ass-cart, suddenly dashed into the group.

“What!” she cried. “*Pay down!* did I hear you say, Mrs. Ahearne? *Pay down!*” she repeated. “Do you know who’s spakin’ to you—whose presence you’re in? My mother was a Clifford. *Pay!*” She raised her voice to a perfect scream of fury. “He’d better bring any money near them! Leaden change we’ll have for him! A black curse light upon him and follow him, the ruffian!”

“Amin, amin!” croaked Mary Heffernan, who had not heard more than half she said. “I’ll get up in the cart, Mrs. Roche,” she said to the neighbour who had brought her to market, “for I am that tired an’ w’ary, I am dropping out of my standing.”

Lawder, the agent to Lord Galteemore, under whose rule at least one-third part of the people assembled in the square of Galteetown lived, was a man about forty years of age ; in appearance handsome and attractive-looking. He was a self-made man ; he had begun life, as his name would indicate, as a Roman Catholic, but being ambitious of social as well as pecuniary advancement, he joined the Protestant Church, and, as soon as he came of age, and could afford the subscription, the Freemasons’ Society. He had begun life in an attorney’s office in Dublin, but being clever and hard-working, soon got into business on his own account. He had acquired some

property in the county, was a J.P., and had now held Lord Galteemore's agency for about seven years. When Lawder first came to Galteemore, the chieftain of that ilk was resident in the Castle, a big, square, modern house, situated in a splendid demesne close to the ruins—Cromwellian, of course—of what had been the chief fortification of the town. But this had ceased to be so. The family had now been away for more than a year, and was likely to remain away still longer. This change in their habits had been brought about by different causes. Lawder's leading characteristic was love of rule. So long as Lord Galteemore was at home, his position was but a secondary one; not that his employer ever interfered or allowed complaint or appeal; but Lawder wanted to rule absolutely—he did virtually; but so long as the Earl and Countess were there, he felt himself to be overshadowed. He could not understand

their liking to spend eight months of the year in such a mountain fortress as Galteetown, and he thought London or Paris infinitely more suitable as permanent places of residence; he would prefer either of them for himself—or thought he would. He had not enjoyed the agency for three months when he made up his mind that it would be better for all parties that Galteemore Castle ceased to be the home of its owners. They ought to live in Portman Square; they could do so very well; her Ladyship would like it; and then the agent could reside in the Castle; one of the ground-floor rooms could be made into an office. Lawder's own residence and farm was five miles out in the country; and he found it excessively inconvenient to have to keep an office in the town.

Lord Galteemore was by no means a model landlord; but that did not prevent his being popular. He had a pleasant manner, and

knew how to talk to the people, in itself a talent; but he had not the slightest scruple in raising the rent where he saw that the land was increased in value. It was not the custom of the estate to grant leases. The tenants all held at will, and the rents had been raised pretty often. Lord Galteemore had been educated from his boyhood in England, and had lived a “stormy youth,” as was the family habit, fifty per cent of his income went to pay off mortgages. So, when a couple of threatening letters reached him at his club in London, though somewhat hurt, he was not particularly surprised. He took the hint, and did not return. But it is probable that he would not have acted upon it so promptly had he not determined, on the occasion of his eldest son’s coming of age, to break the entail, and, by disposing of a part of the estate, reduce the heavy drain upon his income. He meant to raise his rental all round this coming

Michaelmas—not that he intended to exact the increase, not at all ; it was a mere nominal thing, as would be carefully explained to the tenants. They would all continue at the former rates, but once sold, the purchaser of the property could do as he liked. He had done this once before with a small portion of his estate. Lawder knew nothing of this intention on his noble patron's part ; but Galteetown had learned it in some mysterious manner, and the knowledge did not lessen the ill-will with which the agent was regarded. It would suit Lord Galteemore admirably to remain away for an indefinite length of time. He was too good-natured to wish to witness actual hardship, and the increase undoubtedly meant that to some of his mountain tenantry. As for Lawder, it is unlikely that such scruples would trouble him ; not, indeed, that he was by any means of an unamiable disposition. On the contrary, he was liberal and off-handed

in his dealings, except in business matters. He never passed one of the old applewomen of the town without jerking her a small piece of silver. In fact, he rather cultivated goodwill. Nevertheless, he was despised as an upstart and pretender, and his real sentiments, which were much more aristocratic than those of Lady Galteemore, were well known, and gave great offence to the people. He was a great stickler for class prestige and restrictions; believed all the smaller tenants to be far too well off for their station in life. He could hardly keep his temper when he heard of one of them "fortuning off" his daughter; and he fully agreed with Lady Galteemore that the common people should not be educated, and that the effect of reading is to make the lower orders discontented. Although Mr. Lawder and the Countess agreed upon these points, there was a considerable difference between them. She had the old grand manner which belongs to

real feudalism, and which threatens to disappear with it. She never offended or insulted any one, and though disapproving of the feelings and ways of the people, she either respected, or seemed to respect them. Lawder's very civility was odious to them. How dare that “got-up” give himself airs with his horses and dogs! The country was greatly come down when the gentry suffered that fellow in the hunting-field. His love of coursing, joined to the fact of his possessing some prize greyhounds, in a measure attracted some of the better-class farmers' sons to him; but he was distrusted by the people at large. He had, moreover, but an indifferent reputation; he was married when he came to Galteetown, but had now been a widower for three years. He had one child. His house had been kept for him since his wife's death by an elderly female relation, who had left his roof six months before, on account of “a scandal,” the same

which the market-women now discussed so angrily in connection with his recent marriage, and which Lawder was likely to expiate bitterly.

The priest's housekeeper bought Mrs. Murphy's chickens at her own price, and despatched her home with them to Chapel House. "I don't care for those Murphys," she observed to a neighbour; "they are terribly impudent. You mind the trick they played here on his reverence when that one got married to Dan Murphy. No? troth I thought it was well known. They had not the pound, only thirteen shillings of it, and his reverence, when he settled to marry them for the pound, would not take less. Dan Murphy up and told him to wait—he would just step outside and borrow the few shillings; he knew a man in the town would give it to him. What does he do—will you believe me? —but take his reverence's good coat off the

hook in the hall and over with it to Looby beyond, and pawn it for seven shillings. Yes, he did, and then came back, and when his reverence had done with them, Dan Murphy hands him the pound and the pawn-ticket of his own good coat."

"That was a cheek!" observed Mrs. Ahearne, with fitting reprobation. Mrs. Roche laughed out loud and long. She came of a good fighting stock—the Clifford blood was Cromwellian—and her reverence of the priest's housekeeper was by no means as strong as her enjoyment of the discomfiture of the parish priest, as well as the humour of Mr. Dan Murphy.

"My blessin' to him," said Mary Heffernan, but under her breath, taking her cue from her patroness, as she climbed with difficulty into the cart. She would have said precisely the same thing had she been told that Dan Murphy had been killed by an avenging thunderbolt.

“That Dan Murphy is himself,” went on the priest’s housekeeper. “The other night him and her had to be separated by the police. He was layin’ on to her wid one of the geese —had it be the legs—an’ she back at him with her old hen turkey. She made an end of the turkey soon, though. They’re horrible people those Murphys !”

“Turkeys is delicate,” observed Mrs. Ahearne, as if the unsuitability of that bird as a weapon of defence had suddenly occurred to her. It was the sole thought suggested to her by the housekeeper’s anecdote.

“Lawder ought to get rid of *them* now,” continued the housekeeper. “But does he ever do what he ought ?”

“Four thousan’ of a fortune ! Laws !” repeated Mrs. Roche, reverting to the popular topic. “I wonder what sort she’ll be. ‘Tis a power o’ money if the woman’s young.”

“Young *an’* good-looking !” repeated the

housekeeper, with the same bitter voice. She did not know whether she spoke truth or not, but it pleased her to pour oil on the flame of popular resentment against Lawder.

“Ah,” snarled Mrs. Roche, “it’s the likes of him meets in wid luck. Sure, look at him with his hunting horses and his dogs, and his new gig, and look at all the money he airns, doing nothing for it but sit in that office and take the rints, and may be potther with a little writing.” Lawder was a hard-working, energetic agent, but Mrs. Roche’s conception of work was limited to picking stones off a field, or churning on a hot summer’s day. “Good day to yez all,” she said suddenly. “Come on,”—this was to her donkey, catching his head and proceeding to drag the cart out of the crowd.

Mary Heffernan, whose brown wrinkled face was flushed with the exertion of getting into the cart, was no sooner settled comfortably

on the seat than she recollected her grievance ; and, moved to sudden wrath, shook her fist in the face of the constabulary man as the ass-cart passed him.

“ Listen to me, peeler ! If I have to leave me little place and cross the say this year—do you hear me ?—as sure as God made little apples I'll do it on a rope, I will. I'll have Lawder's life.”

The constabulary man looked at the little feeble old creature who was threatening him with the energy and venom of a September wasp, and burst into a roar of laughter at the sight. Mrs. Roche, who had just taken her seat beside her, gave her a push with her elbow in friendly warning. Slight as it was, it was sufficient to upset Mrs. Heffernan's equilibrium. She tumbled over backwards into the hay among the parcels, where, overcome by sleep and heat, she shortly fell into a peaceful doze.

They had five miles to go before Mrs. Roche

and Mrs. Heffernan reached the cross roads where they were to part company. It was close upon half-past five when they started, and the donkey's pace, homeward though his steps were turned, was deliberate in the extreme. It was not long before his owner was forced to lighten his load by getting out. There was no need to lead the animal, so she trudged along in the deep dust, keeping abreast of his head, and now and again encouraging him with strange-sounding expletives ; Mary Heffernan meantime sleeping the sleep of the just. The sun crept down in a yellow blinding glare towards the summit of Keeper on the far side of the valley. The river lay white and glistening with a sheen as of new silver among the trees below them. The heat was still intense, not a breath of air was stirring, but as she wiped the perspiration from her face, Mrs. Roche thought of her oat-field thankfully. The potatoes were nearly ripe in the fields as they trudged by ;

the blight was visible here and there in patches, and its bodeful smell made itself felt in the air, despite the meadowsweet which shook out its almond scent as they passed, and the innumerable odours of the flowering weeds.

Weeds there were everywhere. Tall thistles loosed and sent abroad countless winged messengers of mischief. Ragweed grew all round them, lifting its brazen head even in the potato ridges, and crowning every ditch ; nettles and docks and thistles sprang up, pushing their lusty growth like the indigenous lords of the soil, out into the very highway itself, and dandelions, vetch, and purple loose-strife crowded in their shade. Everything was ripe, the blackberries were already turning, the haws had a bronzed look, and the berries of the mountain ash hung in brilliant clusters, the hue of which was caught and repeated by the poppies among the other dusty weeds at the roadside. The people had all gone home

from work, and, save the crows busy among the potato drills, or the cooing of the wood-pigeons which peopled the copses, not a sound broke the stillness.

At last they reached the cross roads, where they were to part company. The instant the cart stopped Mary Heffernan woke up and tumbled herself out upon the road; then she grasped her bag of meal and swung it over her shoulder. "God reward you, Mrs. Roche," she said. "God reward you always, for you are a good woman."

"Good night to you, Mary Heffernan."

"You are a kind woman to me, Mrs. Roche."

"Ah, whisht! good night to you," was Mrs. Roche's reply, accompanied by a thump to that portion of the donkey's body which was nearest to her. The cart drove off through the pine-wood, and Mary Heffernan bent her back and faced the hill-road that led to her.

home. She had a good mile and a half to climb, and after many a stumble and weary halt she found herself at the boreen, or little road, that led to her little brown cabin. It was more like the bed of a torrent than a path. Great loose boulders that the winter torrents had hurled upon it, baked white by the sun, now lay half bedded in the dust. The banks at each side showed masses of blue limestone among the ferns and brambles, hare-bells clustered in the moss, and the foxglove and poppies were thick among the dusty nettles and the omnipresent rag-weed. Half-way up this lane she met her husband, who was waiting there for her. He was a thin, anxious-looking old man, with fine dark eyes, very poorly clad, and seemingly both out of health and spirits.

Mary Heffernan stopped and rested the meal-bag against the dyke side, and wiping the perspiration off her face with her hands began at once—

“I did sell the little chickens—yes; an’ there was a power of ducks and chickens in the place. Con,” she was fumbling in her pocket as she spoke, “and there is yer bit of tobacka, Limerick Twist it is, for you. Oh, weary on ye for mail—ugh;” she had hoisted the bag on her back again. “My poor arms are tired; only for that good woman below there, that gives me a lift, sure I might die with all my sins about me on that road. There was not much butter in the market; the mountainy people brought down but little. The place is all burnt up, you see.”

Con had lighted his pipe and was trudging stolidly ahead. She followed him as closely as she could, talking all the time. Another might easily have seen from her hurried pouring forth that she had bad news to tell, and was by degrees approaching it as circuitously as possible. This was her habit; but it sometimes happens that the people who in this

world least know each other's habits are the husbands and wives who have lived forty years together.

“Mrs. Roche,” she continued, scarcely stopping to take breath, “got tenpence for her butter—very sweet butter that red cow of hers do make. Oh dear, Con! but I am weighted wid' this bag.”

Con grunted sympathisingly; but never turned his head.

“Mrs. Ahearne have had a letter from her boy Johnny; he send her two pound. She says he is in New York, but the letter it say Brooklyn; those Ahearne never much mind what they do say, anyhow. He have twelve dollars a week in a factory.”

“Twelve dollars a week, you tell me!—two pound ten a week!” repeated the old man, turning round. “I wish I had gone to America when I was young. You went to the post-office, Mary?”

“ Yes I did, Con ; but there is no letter.”

They were at the cabin now. A little moss-grown, squat house showed itself. It was built in a hollow below the level of the pathway ; a thicket of fir-trees screened it on its west side. The evening sun wrapped these all about in golden mist, and their tall red stems seemed to glow in a sort of hot, dusty blaze. An enormous house-leek was growing on the roof of the cabin. It was in blossom, and a flame-coloured plume of flowers nodded above the door. A couple of hens, the mother and aunts, no doubt, of the half-dozen chickens she had sold that morning, met their mistress at the door with a hungry clucking. She made an unamiable kick at them, which they eluded upwards, not sideways, and passed in. The little cabin was all but dark. From the *grieshoch*, which was as she had left it that morning, she perceived the faintest possible glow. She seized a couple of dry sods from

the heap beside the fire, with her fingers removed the gray ashes, and blowing on the mass, soon made a blaze. Then she went to a corner, where the three-legged iron pot had been laid upon its side for the convenience of the feathered inhabitants of the house, whose custom it was to pick it clean, and taking it without to a spring that gurgled into a natural basin a little farther up from the house, washed it well, and bringing it back placed it upon the fire, half filled with water.

Con was smoking, seated on a stone before the door; when his pipe was finished, he entered the cabin and sat down on a chair by the fireside. The three-legged pot was boiling by this time, and she was stirring in handfuls of meal. The flickering light of the turf showed the interior in all its poverty. An old dresser, in the boards of which there were great cracks, held a half-dozen plates and three jugs, only one of which was not past its work

—a few cups, all of different colours and shapes, hung from nails, and a black tea-pot, with a broken nose, occupied one corner of the shelf, where it had long enjoyed a holiday. The churn was laid away in a corner. It was close on a year since the cow had been sold, and there was no pig.

“What did you get for the chickens?” asked the old man, knocking as he spoke the ashes from his pipe on the hearthstone.

“Four and sixpence for them all. I sold three for fifteen pence, to Darcy it was,” she replied, looking up furtively at him.

He had laid his pipe upon the shelf beside him, and was now leaning both hands upon his stick. After a moment’s pause, it seemed as if it took some time for him to realise the import of what was said to him, he struck the stick on the floor, “Did he send any word to me?” he asked.

Mary Heffernan stooped her head over the

pot and sighed bitterly. This was the fatal item of news which she had kept to the last.

“Said ‘twas little use your goin’ to him,” she replied in a choked voice, after a pause, during which the bubbling of the porridge seemed unnaturally loud. He said not a word, but looked at her fixedly for an instant, then let his head fall upon the hands which rested upon the stick and groaned.

The porridge bubbled and boiled, as by degrees the fitful flame of the turf drove out the last lingering reflections of the August evening. It lighted up the bent white head of the old man, and Mary Heffernan’s ragged red shawl, with the corner of which she was now and again wiping away the tears which coursed one another down her withered cheeks.

Mrs. Roche had a good couple of miles to travel yet ere she reached her home after setting down her neighbour. Onward and upward through the odorous shadow of the

pine-wood, and skirting the rugged breast of Galteemore, the donkey-cart dragged its weary way until the pasture slopes on the farther side of the mountain were reached. The road had become so steep that she frequently had to put her hand to the shaft and help the donkey to pull the cart up the uneven dusty path. She made all the speed she could, for it was growing late. The sun was fast vanishing at the back of Keeper—one long, trembling shaft of rich gold colour lingered yet on the mountain top ; but the purple shadows were stretching upward on its flanks, and the great patches of heather seemed like lamps going out one by one, when at last she reached her village, if village could be called a half-dozen mossgrown cabins clustered among the rocks. Her farm lay a little higher up. As she guided the tired donkey into a narrow path which led up to her house, a tall, slim girl jumped down from behind a rock where she

had been waiting, and clinging to her skirt and following her as closely as he could, came a chubby, ragged urchin of four, bare-legged and with a head and face burned by the sun to the colour of ripe wheat.

“ Mammy ! mammy ! ” he shouted, jumping into the middle of the path in front of the cart.

“ Ay,” responded mammy, rather hoarsely
“ stand out of the way, will ye ? ”

“ Where’s my sugarstick ? ” he demanded, beginning to kick and caper in the dust.

Mrs. Roche was tired and cross, and had forgotten the sugarstick in the excitement and hurly-burly ; it did not improve her temper to remind her of it, and that she had disappointed the child—her Benjamin.

“ Sugarstick ! ” she shouted angrily. “ How dare ye ask me for sugarstick ! Norah, why haven’t ye that child in bed ? Nothin’ will serve ye but sugarstick ; wait till I get you, and see the bating I’ll give ye ! ”

He stared at her with wide-opened brown eyes for an instant. Then, on her making a feint to catch him, he turned and ran as fast as he could up the road. She shook her fist after him. The brown legs scudded off through the dust, and the tangled yellow head never turned to look round.

“Sugarstick, indeed ! Ye have that boy destroyed, Norah,” grumbled Mrs. Roche, relenting of her humour already. Norah never even looked round. She had taken the bridle and was dragging the ass after her up the steep hilly path.

“Weary on ye both, ye tormints ! I am dead bet up, I am. Tom !” she called, getting sight of a man who was standing in the yard at the end of the house ; “come and take out the beast.” He lounged forward obediently ; he was a big, good-humoured-looking man, in his shirt sleeves. His coat was lying on top of the dyke.

There was every sign of plenty and prosperity about, notwithstanding the untidiness; a lean-to cow-house, the door of which was open, showed a couple of calves tethered in the stalls. The cows were all in the fields, a large potato patch was behind the house, and side by side with it several acres of oats. A good-sized pool of liquid slush, with an opalescent scum upon its surface, decorated the yard before the cow-house. A flock of geese, recognising their mistress, advanced out of its tempting precincts to greet her with a noisy clamour. From a ruinous wall, where a row of turkeys were perched, came querulous sounding plaints, and ducks and hens came and went about the threshold. That part of the yard close to the house had once been paved, but was badly in need of repairs. Grass grew everywhere that the passers' feet allowed, and a fair number of the window panes were mended with paper. The oat-field, of which

a broken wall gave a full view, was like a botanical garden: hawkweed topped all the multi-colour weeds, its humble relation the dandelion growing faithfully close to it, side by side with a red flush of poppies, two or three kinds of thistles, and purple vetch, while the margin was kept by meadowsweet and ragweed, all in prime of their bloom, and scenting the air deliciously. No one interfered with them; the children, who had holiday now, and lay about all day in the sun as they chose, dreamed as little of weeding as of sewing or reading. Norah had two bigger sisters who were at a convent school—an expense somewhat unsuited to the family means; but Mrs. Roche had an uncle a priest, and deemed it needful to keep up the respectability of the family by causing her daughters to learn French and the use of the globes. The boys, of whom there were three, ranging from fifteen down to the four-year-old Mick, held, like

their parents, that weeding was no use. No one weeds. The thistle and dandelion, if rooted out in one place, would only be blown on to it again from the neighbours. They held nearly two hundred acres, only eighty of which was good land, and two acres of that at least were wasted in ditches. "That was always so," like the weeds and like sowing the refuse potatoes of a worn-out variety, for the equally valid reason that "every one did it." They kept two horses, chiefly for their amusement, for Roche and his eldest son were fond of attending funerals and races, and a woman-servant to cook for and feed the animals.

Inside the house, which was a two-storied plastered edifice, things were much like the poor Heffernans' cabin. There was the same clay floor, the turf burning on the hearthstone — everything was much the same, but there seemed to be more of it, more delf on the

dresser, a larger turf fire, and a larger pot swinging by a chain over it. There was, above all, the same smell of turf-smoke, of feather-bed, of hens, and, in this instance, of sour milk also. A good dozen of holy pictures, yellowed by turf-smoke and well fly-speckled, hung round about the room, but there was not the slightest evidence of any real difference between Roche, well-to-do man as he was, and any labourer in the country at ten shillings a week. Mrs. Roche wore a silk dress on Sunday and drove to mass on her "side car." That did not prevent her putting a blazing spark of turf into the churn before setting to make butter, and consulting a wise woman when a cow fell ill, in preference to the veterinary surgeon in Galteetown. Her mother-in-law lived with them; they agreed on the whole fairly well. Mrs. Roche senior always held that her daughter-in-law expected too much, seeing the figure of her fortune. She grumbled

over the side car, though she had a seat on the same vehicle every Sunday to last mass, and she grumbled most of all over the expensive schooling of her two grand-daughters. The money, in her opinion, would have been far better kept to "fortune them off." She had had "no larning," as she frequently and unnecessarily remarked. She could neither read nor write, and her confessions were a matter of wonder and trouble to the parish priest. She could, however, feed calves and cram turkeys, spin, knit, and make candles, accomplishments of which her daughter-in-law, who had had a smattering of schooling, was destitute. There was not a book in the house save the children's tattered national school books. Roche read the *Freeman*, which he subscribed for in union with two neighbouring farmers. He was a lazy, good-tempered man, a tenant at will, his rent had been raised twice since he got possession of his farm, and he expected, with some

show of reason, for it was still, speaking relatively, low rented, that the process would be repeated, a consideration which did not stimulate him to increased exertion.

Nothing could be more thriftless or untidy than his method of farming ; a gap was stopped with a bush, a cart-wheel, or a plough, just as his father and grandfather had done before him. He steadfastly ignored all improvements and hated novelties. He had a kind of regard for Lord Galteemore as a noble of the old stock, and hated Lawder. Religious he could hardly be called ; he believed that all Protestants were destined for perdition in the next world just as surely as high place and prosperity seemed to be their lot in this ; he paid his dues regularly, always alleging that he did so to keep the priest's tongue off him. He was sociable, and not altogether without a grain of sentiment. He remembered and loved the stories of '98 ; had seen Smith O'Brien, and

could repeat from memory one or two of Davis' poems. He was not without a keen though dumb appreciation of nature, a thing more common than is generally supposed in his class ; and he loved of a summer's evening to watch the sunset set forth its beauties in the heavens. But he never saw the hideous squalor of his own daily life. Not that he had not examples of neatness and cleanliness. The habits of centuries are not so easily rooted out, especially when interest and national prejudice combine to preserve them. Lady Galteemore, indeed, made a point, whenever she drove her English visitors through the country, of explaining to them at length the cause, in her opinion, of this dirt and savagery. It was all the priests' doings. The Pope was at the bottom of it ; as if more perfect cleanliness and order could be found than any Irish Roman Catholic convent can show. She forgot, too, as did her listeners, that France and Belgium

also profess that despised creed, but she felt bound to explain away what she felt to be a tacit reproach to herself.

Roche was a nationalist of course, and spent more evenings than his wife liked at a tavern of not too good repute at the Cross Roads. What the object of these reunions might be, or the conversations that took place at them, she never knew, though she might guess sometimes ; but the worthy farmer invariably returned the worse for liquor, and now and again mysterious deficits occurred in the family “ stocking.”

Mrs. Roche was met at the house door by her mother-in-law, who was in the act of flattening out a large flour cake into the shape of a wheel between her hands. There was a rolling-pin in the house, but she liked the old-fashioned way.

“ But you’re late, Mary Ann ! ” was her salutation. “ I began the cake without waitin’ on

ye longer. Tom is wanting his supper this hour—he's goin' over to the Cross Roads to-night."

A quick, sharp look was exchanged by the two women. "What news have ye?" went on the elder. "Mrs. Connor was in here on her way home from market. Heffernan's son is to be home next week, she tells me. Can get nothin' to do; they'll have to quit that place surely. Mary Clifford was taken to Cork yesterday to be put off to America."

"Ye have all the news, I see," snapped her daughter-in-law, cutting her short. She, as a Clifford partisan, did not wish to hear her faction run down.

"What word of Lawder and the new wife, eh?" questioned the granny, although she knew as much as her daughter-in-law.

"*There'll be bad work,*" Mrs. Roche observed in a low voice, more to herself than to the granny, who was now laying the cake

in the griddle, which was ready warm by the fireside.

“Oh,” said the old woman, returning to the unwelcome topic, “faît yes ! not a Clifford in the market to-day ; don’t wonder they keep out of sight either, poor people. Lawder’s bringing home the new wife to-night ; I heard he has got a power of money with her——”

At that instant the servant entered, a red-legged, very fat girl of about twenty, carrying a pail of water. The old woman stopped suddenly. At critical times like the present prudence is necessary.

“Look at that cake afire,” cried Mrs. Roche suddenly and angrily, diverting all her vexation perforce into that side channel. The granny was so lost in thought that she did not perceive a tiny smoke rising from the centre of the griddle.

“Let it be !” snapped the old woman. “I know how to bake a cake.”

“What’s this you done to Micky ?” said the farmer’s voice at the door. He had seated himself on the doorstep, and the little fellow, who had been disappointed of his sugarstick, stood by him with a sulky pout on his grimy face.

“Come here wid ye, tormint,” said the mother. She went to a press, and taking a loaf thence which she had brought home with her from the town, cut him a slice, which she spread with dark-brown sugar. “I must give him something or he’ll say I’m a liar. Say thank you now, and take that puss off you this minute,” she said, holding it away from him until he obeyed. He obeyed her and grinned, then carried his prize back to the doorstep. He was a pretty child, the youngest of the brood, and spoilt.

The father winked at him approvingly.

“There ye are now, Mick ; and more power to ye, son.”

“Are ye going to the Cross Roads to-night ?”

asked the wife from within in a complaining voice.

He made her no answer, but began to sing—

“ To the Currach of Kildare
The boys they will repair,
And Lord Edward will be there,
Says the Shan-van-vogt.”

Mrs. Roche asked no more questions. The singing, varied by conversation with Mick, was kept up until the cake was cooked, and the moment the meal was over, the farmer put on his hat and took the road down hill.

It was dark when Roche got out of the boreen on to the highroad ; there was a chill in the air after the fierce heats of the day, and the dew was descending in a thick soft shower. Every blade of grass was loaded already, and the harvest moon, seen through the mists that overhung the valley, looked like an enormous copper shield set in the sky. He had advanced

about twenty paces, when a voice hailed him out of the darkness—

“ Roche, hey—Tom Roche ! ”

“ Charley, were you waiting on me ? ”

A tall slim figure rose from the hedge-side and approached him.

“ I was waiting for ye—who all will be in it to-night ? ”

“ Below at Bruff’s ? there’ll be the town men and a good few from the neighbourhood. Charley,—and Roche swung something closer to the younger man, and lowered his voice—“ say nothin’, do you hear me ? Fenton and Hynes will both be there, and I warn ye ‘tis dangerous.”

“ I tell you, Tom,” replied he in a dogged undertone, “ I’ll have no drawing nor casting ; ‘tis my affair to shoot that —, an’ no one shall interfere.”

“ Whist, ye young fool ! That’s all well enough, but do you want to be taken, eh ?

Let the drawing purceed even as usual, and leave the rest to me and Bruff and Connor. Don't let Hynes or Fenton know anyway who it is to do the job. We'll settle all that."

"There'll be an after meeting, then?" said Clifford. "All I can say is, before the week is out——" He halted suddenly, and without finishing his sentence took off his hat, and with his hand put back his thick dark hair from his forehead.

Roche stopped also, and glanced at him. He could see that his face was livid in colour, and his eyes seemed to burn under the marked brows.

"Keep quiet, Charley—keep quiet," urged he; "you can have all you want. Where's the good of bringing trouble on yourself? I don't see why not let any of the others take their chance as well as you. Sure they have all a good cause equally with yourself. Look at the Connors to be put out and Heffernans."

“Ah, whist, Roche! what’s that to me?
Have they the cause I have?”

Roche made no answer, and they held on their way down hill in silence. Before long they reached their destination, a thatched cabin by the road-side. It was a licensed house of entertainment. Peter Bruff, the owner, possessed an unimpeachable character, and had a brother in the constabulary, yet it was currently supposed that no fewer than eight agrarian murders had been planned in the Cross Roads Tavern.

Roche and Charles Clifford were the last arrivals. The shop was thronged with men, many of them well-to-do farmers’ sons, well dressed, and prosperous of appearance; some were mere labourers, or small farmers almost of that class. These had been harvesting all day, for it was the busy time of the year, and could with difficulty keep their eyes open. There were at least forty men present; some of them

were smoking, and only that the windows were open, the place would have been intolerable. The scene was dimly illumined by a couple of little oil lamps, which added their quota to the evil odours of whisky, tobacco, and turf-smoke which already pervaded the atmosphere, and threw a sinister light upon the crowd.

One man was sitting at a small deal table, engaged in entering in a book the numbers, not the names, of those who were present. He was the secretary of the Secret Society. This ceremony over he rose, and taking the slip of paper in his hands, began to call over the numbers; each man answered to his number. Clifford hung his head and slouched into a corner. Roche and Connor sat down by the table. They, with Bruff, the tavern-keeper, and the secretary, who was a shopboy from Galteetown, were the leading spirits of the Society.

“ Since our last meeting,” began the secre-

tary, “the sum of thirty-five shillings has been paid in by number thirty-eight, and in accordance with the new rules, three parts of that sum have been remitted to Dublin. Two new members have been enrolled.”

“Ah ! whist ! curse you !” interpolated Charles Clifford, pushing forward from his recess ; “ who cares for your rules ? Mark them read, and come on and let us see that gun you were to bring up.”

“Now, Charley Clifford, be easy,” said Roche, taking the pipe out of his mouth, and shaking his hand at the young man in warning ; “ don’t interrupt ; let business proceed orderly.”

“The gun is here, if Puck isn’t,” said a man, rising to his feet in a far corner. “Who’s goin’ to take charge of it, I want to know now. I am after spending the best part of the day upon it, dug it up, begorra, and cleaned it.”

He advanced to the table, and laid the gun upon it. It was an Enfield rifle. The stock had been cut in two for facility of packing and carriage, but it had been artistically done, and the ring covered the cut perfectly. It was reeking with grease, which had been liberally plastered on the wood and metal alike. Every eye in the room was fixed upon the gun, as if fascinated. Roche stretched out his hand, and was about to touch it half-timidly, when young Clifford stepped out, rudely pushing him aside, and snatched it up. Every eye in the room was turned upon him at once. He stooped toward the lamp, and the light fell on his face, showing a very handsome boyish countenance ; his cheeks and lips were pale under the sunburn, and his dark eyes had a wild, sullen look in them.

“ Is Puck coming ? ” asked some one behind.

“ I don’t know, Fenton,” replied the secretary in a loud voice. “ I heard to-day from

Blaney that brings the fish from Waterford, that he's off up by way of Charleville."

Puck was the *nom de guerre* of a man who was known to have shot a landlord in Cork, and was suspected, with some good reason, of having fired at another not quite so effectually, about a year after the first offence. He was a good aim too, and it was thought he was making a profession of it. There was a reward of two thousand pounds offered for such information as would lead to his arrest. The money had been accumulating for five years up to the present date, and there was every likelihood of its remaining unclaimed for an indefinite period to come. His wife and family lived in Galteetown, in a lane behind the court-house; he visited them frequently, in broad daylight sometimes, it was said, but it must be allowed that he came and went from one place to another invariably on foot, and that he also invariably chose the shelter

of the ditches and the unfrequented field paths in preference to the highways.

The secretary exchanged a look with Bruff and Roche on hearing the question put by Fenton, whom they knew to be a spy. He must be put on a wrong scent, and without delay. Clifford received with a scowl a warning kick from his friend Roche.

“The rules will be adhered to,” replied the secretary coldly; “draw lots.”

“Put in Jim Heffernan’s name; he’ll be home next week, and won’t like to be left out of the job,” suggested some thoughtful friend in the background.

At least twenty absent members were at once suggested. The secretary set himself to write out the numbers on slips of paper, and conversation became general.

“Is this true what I heard to-day?” asked a voice with an American twang in it; “be the same token, that he is to revalue the whole

estate against next year, when my Lord's eldest son is coming of age, to break the entail.

“I know what that means—revalue for selling,” said Roche, getting up. “Do ye mind how it was fifteen or sixteen years ago with the Gortscreen property, before he sold that, the Lord had it all raised? He told the tenants it meant nothing; he'd never ask them for it. He sold it in the Estates Court in Dublin to that Englishman the very same autumn, and raised those rents were then in earnest. Oh, bedad, boys, he must be stopped at that game!”

“Bruff,” said the secretary, “will you give me some porter?”

“In a minute,” replied the landlord, who was busy serving the other customers.

“Heffernan's son is coming back, ye say, next week,” said a young man who had not spoken yet; “can get no work in England at all. The wife is at service down at Captain

Crawford's. They are noticed, and so are a couple or more of the mountain people. How the devil can they pay?"

"Pay?" echoed the secretary. "Those mountain people are all in debt. Coolan below in the town is to take decrees out against twelve of them next sessions: up to eighty pounds they owe him; and they most of them owe us for seed potatoes, and oats too. What can ye do? Sure they haven't the money, and where are they to get it?"

"You bet, and a man is to be put out if he gets behind: given no time nor chance, but heaved out," remarked the American-sounding voice. Its owner advanced to the front now; he was a young fellow of twenty-eight or so, called Cassidy.

Cassidy had been in America, and was a leading spirit among the young men—a Jacobin to the core; and, as he said of himself, "very advanced." He had all the

cant of the advanced school; never spoke of poor people save by the term "proletariate." Capital and labour, solidarity and monopoly, were words for ever in his mouth. He ostentatiously kept away from mass, and inveighed against the "black brigade," "priestly influence," and "sacerdotalism," so bitterly that had it not been for his Yankee accent he might have been mistaken for a Connaught Souper. The young fellows listened to him as if he spoke with the tongue of an angel. They did not remark, as more than one of the elder men did, that their apostle had a remarkably soft white pair of hands. The real secret of his influence with them was that, over and above his command of language, he was strictly sober; he never tasted whisky; wine he did not despise when it was to be had for nothing; but Cassidy was ambitious; he had taught himself shorthand, and meant to be a journalist. He concocted and sent paragraphs

to the Press Association ; and he knew that he could not afford to destroy his brain with the fiery stuff which the young farmers consumed in such quantities. He had that sort of readiness of speech which unthinking people believe to be in a way the birthright of the Celt. It is a great mistake. The talent for explanation, as some one has defined oratory, is rare enough among the Irish : they can feel and know both perhaps passionately, but these thick-tongued, slow-minded creatures are always carried away with gratitude to any one who, while feeling with them, possesses in addition the gift of putting their common thought into articulated form. Cassidy could not only do this, but he had a store of quotations as well. He had read not without profit the national poets, and could introduce with effect sundry telling lines from Clarence Mangan, from Moore or Davis, in a way that reminded the elder men of the hedge-schools

of their youth, and the traditions of culture, now long lost and vanished, of which they had once upon a time a glimpse. Cassidy had an influence which was daily growing. His sobriety was to some a proof of his disinterestedness, while to others it was in itself suspicious. A teetotaller is in the farming mind a sort of monster. It was a critical time, and Cassidy saw the advantage it gave him, and was not slow to seize it. Everybody was in debt. Money was not to be got without huge interest. Every one had a grievance, and liked to hear it put into form and talked about. The secretary of the meeting was, as has been said, a shopman in the town, and his master lent money to the country people. He held I.O.U.'s to an enormous amount, and of course his clients were forced to deal at his shop. Bruff, their host, lent money to the neighbours at something like forty per cent. As Cassidy had told them at a previous

meeting, their necks were all in the collar together. How affairs were to be improved by murdering Lord Galteemore's agent they never stopped to ask. It was their time-honoured method of protesting against injustice, taking revenge and gratifying the instinct of nationality at the same time,—(although Lawder was as Irish as themselves, as a magistrate he administered English law). Lawder had been agent for seven years, and had with impunity raised rents here and there, wherever an improving tenant had built a couple more rooms to his house, that his growing-up daughters might be separated from their brothers and from the farm servants, or if he observed that they were taking good crops off the land, though it might have been bog when the tenant got it. If a persecuted and broken tenant threw up the farm, there was always some one ready to slip in. A farm need never be vacant in a place

where there was absolutely no other employment for men or money but farming. It was round and round always; what was the way out of it? There was no law to help them, and as for going before the magistrate with a complaint, why, that magistrate was a landlord or an agent himself, or the brother or cousin of landlords, which was the same thing in their eyes, or worse.

Now why had not Lawder been shot before this? Because every man's business is no man's work, as the old men would have said. Cassidy would have laid it to the account of a "fatal slavish want of initiation." Now that Charles Clifford had determined to avenge his sister's ruin, everybody came forward with a grievance, calling equally for a bloody revenge. There was a cowardly motive underneath this sudden access of homicidal mania. Lawder must be stopped by some one, and Clifford was the right man to do it; so they were all

encouraging him in the undertaking, and stimulating themselves in so doing by recounting their individual grievances.

“Well,” said Connor suddenly, “takin’ one wid another, Lord Galteemore was a fair-goin’ man enough. So he was. Never minded if a man divided his bit of land or not. Ye could live under him. I’ll say that. He was no persecutor, and he lived in the place and giv’ employment.”

Although Connor occupied a leading place in the Society, he was anything but advanced in his ideas. He was very hard-working, and paid his rent with punctuality. He was illiterate. Lady Galteemore had a sort of regard for him as a tenant who had a due sense of his own humble station, and held rightminded ideas. She met him one day, and after some conversation, asked him if he could read. Connor replied, “*No, my Lady, I cannot; I cannot, indeed; what use would reading be to me?*”

“And gave employment,” sneered Cassidy ; “but yer the slaves and beggars. ’Stead of thanking him for giving you work, he ought to thank you for doing it. Spiritless hinds ; one would think he had a right to buy and sell you like a drove of swine. That day’s gone for ever. But you have no spirit of men in you. You let an adventuring carpet-bagger” (on a former occasion he had explained the meaning of that imported term) “lord it over you here, as if *he*, an attorney’s clerk—why, it is no time since he got his name on the solicitors’ roll—were Galteemore’s better.”

“Bad’s the best, so,” observed Roche.

“Isn’t it money into his pocket every time the rent is raised ? Eh, answer me that,” went on the orator, standing up. “And who is he, and what is he, to stand in authority over us ? He is not one of the gentry ; and talking of that same, what was Galteemore himself ? A mere Cromwellian and a Union

lord, with that. A Cromwellian officer. Isn't it the O'Flaherty's lands and the church lands that he got, and weren't the original owners the Irish driven over the mountains into Connaught? The church lands belong to the people, and the O'Flaherty's lands must come back to their owners.

“Ireland for the Irish!” continued Cassidy, whose grandmother was Scotch. “Get rid of English thieves, taxing the world to live in idleness. Look at the money the people are earning in New York, in California, everywhere in America—taxed and sent over here to pay rents. Heffernan's daughter's in New York paying the rent for the old people ever since they left this. I'd like to put Lawder on Heffernan's farm, and bid him raise a crop on it, and pay the rent, and make a margin to live on. That's the way to talk. Agents and lords, ay, and kings and queens and emperors, I'd just like to set 'em all in a hundred acre

lot and let 'em scratch round for a living, make 'em raise Indian corn, and put in a fellow with a good goad to poke 'em up now and again."

"Ay, let them earn an honest living," put in Fenton. He seemed to be the most attentive and appreciative of all Cassidy's forty hearers. Hynes, the other informer, was already half-drunk; he had insisted upon treating three or four men, who, he fancied, looked coldly at him. Not one of those present cared in the slightest degree what the informers chose to report. Let them tell the resident magistrate or the sub-inspector of the constabulary that so-and-so had been told off to kill such a one, who was the worse off for that? Could the police prevent it? and when the thing was done, let them prove it if they could. Let them get evidence. Bruff, who was always in a tremor about his license, also gave information to the police

now and again, invariably with the connivance and approbation of the Society. Though it was not generally suspected by that body at large, this affair was one with which the Society had really no business. The heads, Roche, Bruff, Connor, and the secretary, chose to bring it under their jurisdiction for the sake of helping Clifford and protecting him. The charges brought against Lawder were all produced purposely, and had been carefully arranged beforehand.

For example, the item of revaluation. Lawder knew nothing of this project of Lord Galteemore's. A footman in the Portman Square house had overheard a private conversation, and had faithfully written home every word of it to his own people in the town. It was in the same way that the tenantry had become so conversant with Lady Galteemore's sentiments—"Agitators ought to be hanged; seditious speaking did all the

mischief." Her Ladyship's opinions on economical as well as political matters were equally well known to Galteetown and its environs. Her criticism of the bonnets and dresses of her female tenantry were duly reported, as also her conclusion that all these evils, rebellion, and aping the fashions, had come from teaching the common people to read and write. When Mrs. Roche heard for the first time this sump-tuary law laid down by her landlord's wife, she laughed scornfully, and remarked that people that could pay had a right to wear what they liked. She never wore a bonnet save on Sundays, but she determined that her daughters should wear them daily when they came home from school. And she administered a tremendous flogging to her eldest boy for "miching" from school.

The daughters of the other tenants merely remarked that in America every one dressed alike, and thought in their own minds that

her ladyship must be behind the time. Their own servants—for, as a matter of course they had servants—gave the same reason to their mistress for wearing no caps or *praskeens*. In America, that land of promise, there was neither ma'am nor miss, and caps and aprons were never asked for. Probably this fact was to them quite as great an attractive force thitherward as the prepaid passage and promised high wages.

“The papers are ready,” announced the secretary. He swept as he spoke a pile of cut and folded papers into a hat: each paper had a number written upon it.

After every man had taken one, Roche was deputed to draw for the absent numbers, and after a moment announced that he had drawn the fatal lot, with the red cross to it, number sixty-two. It was Heffernan's. Clifford rested his elbow on his knee, and covered his face with his hand. A great

sigh of relief seemed to agitate the air, and after that yawning became general.

“He’ll be here on Monday or Tuesday,” said Roche, with ostentatious loudness, standing up as he spoke. “Now, boys, this day week, if ye don’t get word to the contrary, and there’ll be news for you. Go home now, boys, and Go’ bless ye.”

There was a hint in this valediction which the initiated all understood. Cassidy got up and stretched his legs. “Give me another bottle of ginger-beer,” he said to the landlord. “Jemmy Hynes,” this was to the man whom they suspected of being a spy, “don’t start for one minute, and I’ll be with you down the hill. Larry and O’Hea, hold on for *us*”—this meant really come along with us—“George and Mick, wait for the rest of us.”

The *ruse* succeeded. The suspected parties went off unwillingly under a strong escort, Cassidy brought up the rear, singing with

a mellow baritone that had a mocking echo in it—

“Though sweet are our friendships,
Our hopes, our affections ;
Revenge on a tyrant is sweeter than all.”

“Ay,” growled Fenton ; “bring the patrol on us, do.”

Bruff held the door open, and watched them down the hill. The echoes of the voice died away in the distance, and the heavy feet of the weary men made but little sound in the dust.

“Now,” said Connor, when the door was once more shut, “that’s done, Charley. There’ll be no meeting here this night week.”

“There’s the packet of cartridges, Clifford,” said the secretary hurriedly. “Let me run after the boys, it’s safest ; and there’s an oilskin cover I got for the gun, too. I’m off now, boys. Good-night to ye !”

He handed over a parcel of cartridges,

and a gun-case of dark oiled leather; and then took to his heels and ran as fast as he could after the men who had gone out.

“Charley,” said Bruff, “this night week the confessions for men will be heard at Gort-screen chapel. Lawder comes out to smoke every night after his dinner in the garden at the back. You know the ditch that runs between the end of the garden and the potato-field, eh? Right in the middle of it is a good open up to the hall-door. Every night regular he comes out with his cigar—Judy, my cousin, is at service there—and he never does it later than a quarter to seven. Well, if you can make your dart to the river, you know the ford there, where we were gettin’ eels in the autumn, not twenty yards from where you come out of the long meadow, ay? well, pelt straight up-hill, once ye get over, and there’ll be twenty of us to say ye war

at your duty. What need you care? you'll meet no one but friends."

"Ay," said Roche; "I know the sunk fence at the foot of the garden has a good cover to it, and evergreens between you and the windows. 'Tis seven mile of a run to the chapel, Charley; and mind," with a significant look to a bottle standing near, "don't touch that. If you look out at the ford there'll be a man waitin' for you there, with something to help to carry you up the hill."

Clifford, grasping the gun in both his hands, listened to them in silence; he was taking in every word with grim attention. The lamps had burned themselves out, and one dip candle barely made the darkness visible; the air of the room was indescribably fetid; Roche, feeling, now that the business was all done, that his responsibilities were at an end, was filling himself out a bumper of whisky from a bottle.

"Don't be seen wid that gun," said he suddenly, nodding at it.

"What will I do with it?" burst out Clifford angrily.

"Leave it here wid me," said Bruff, "case and all; you may keep the cartridges. I'll hide it in the dry ditch against you want it."

"If you fail me with that now," said Clifford distrustfully, loosing his grasp of the gun.

"No fears," returned Bruff. He mounted a chair, and thrust the gun into the thatch behind a rafter. "Now," he said, apostrophising the weapon, "lie there till you're wanted."

"Augh, musha," sighed Connor regretfully, "I wished we were done wid it."

"Done wid it!" echoed Bruff. "Sure, as Cassidy says, what way is there to stop them but the one? Frighten them from persecutin' an' harassin'! What do they care about us? Not a curse but take our money."

"Ay so," assented Roche, with a semi-drunken nod, "thru for you."

"Well then," said Connor, "I don't half care for that fellow Cassidy; he has too much to say altogether."

"Arra! what would he work for?" demanded Bruff. Doesn't he make it off writin'? Don't he be sending them paragraphs to the newspapers? Look at him, got thirty shillings for a few little bits of writin' he was no time over."

"Did you *see* that?" demanded Connor sceptically.

"I did; seen him cash the cheque at the bank. There's for you."

Connor scratched his five days' growth of red beard for a while meditatively.

"Education is a great thing surely," he observed, with a sort of wonder. And from that day forward he distrusted Cassidy more than ever.

A little before five in the afternoon of the day chosen—to wit, the Friday following the meeting at the Cross Roads Tavern—Charles Clifford, dressed in a dark-brown tweed suit, walked leisurely down the high road which bordered the farm attached to Carna House, as Lawder's residence was called.

On reaching a clump of limes and chestnuts which marked a gap by the road, he left the footpath and crossed a couple of meadows—taking care to keep in the shelter of the hedges. About twenty minutes' walking brought him to the boundary ditch of the potato-field. He looked over cautiously, to see if any one from the house might be there. The potatoes were ripe, and the digging was to be begun on Monday. Clifford unconsciously repeated to himself that piece of intelligence, which had been made known to him by an old woman whom he had met on the road that morning. Lawder had offered

her picking at eightpence a day. Clifford repeated the old woman's words as he looked over at the field. It was a large field and a splendid crop ; the red head of a poppy showed here and there in the blue-gray mass, brown and scarlet butterflies fluttered over it, and the crows were busy in the ridges. Keeping well behind a bush of alder, he could see the yellow front of the house. It was a big old ivy-grown house, square-fronted and plastered yellow, with innumerable square-topped windows, staring like eyes set in a wall, wherever the ivy allowed them to be seen. The roof was low, and the small slates were all set in white plaster. Huge overgrown Portugal laurels grew at the sides of the house and hid the out-offices. A stable-door, half of which was open, showed among these. A gravelled drive ran round the house and formed a sweep before the porch, which was overhung by a luxuriant if untidy growth of yellow roses and

jessamine. The garden stretched down in terraces to the edge of the potato-field. Some former owner had planned it in the Italian style. The stone balustrade that had marked the steps was broken, and had tumbled off completely at one side, taking with it in its fall the little climbing rose that had overgrown it. One of the two cypresses that stood at the top of the terrace was dead, the shrivelled brown of the withered tree contrasting oddly with the glossy dark green of its companion.

Lawder counted upon moving shortly, so did not take much trouble with the place. The open hall-door gave a view of the hall. New stair-carpets were looked down upon by a battered balustrade of which the paint was all worn off. Every window had fresh, clean, lace curtains, but the white blinds were tattered. And in the garden it was the same ; among the geraniums and asters there was no lack of groundsel and couch-grass.

It was a sultry afternoon ; all the windows were open, and the hot air was full of the buzzing of the wasps and flies. For a good quarter of an hour Clifford crouched watching the terrace and the windows. Then he heard the workmen's bell ring six o'clock from the yard—a cracked, hideous-sounding tocsin ; a gate clanged to ; the sound reached him faintly, and the barking of the yard dog disturbed by it. Was it Lawder coming home or the men going away ? He set his teeth and watched the terrace fixedly for some minutes ; no one appeared. The master of the house had perhaps entered it from the back. Clifford could remain quiet no longer, he lay flat on his face and crawled round the exposed angle of the two fields, and, once on the right side, let himself roll into the ditch.

On his hands and knees, heedless of the nettles and thistles which stung him as he crawled past, of the slugs and frogs which he

disturbed in the dank recesses of the ditch, or the brambles which held his clothes and stayed him perforce, Clifford made his way along the side ditch, and ere long was lying on his back, breathless and gasping, among the fern and harebells in the deep gully that separated the terrace garden from the potato-field. He was not long about finding the gun ; a layer of withered fern fronds caught his eye at once ; he put his hand into the rabbit hole, which had been considerably enlarged, and pulled out the oiled leather case. He put the gun together in an instant—it was perfectly dry—loaded it, and laid it beside him in the ditch to wait his quarry's appearance. He looked at his watch, it was twenty minutes past six ; he had, according to his instructions, over half an hour to wait.

Then, and not until that moment, had he time to observe that he was in a terrible heat ; the drops were rolling from his face, and his

thick hair was all wet. He took out his handkerchief and rubbed his forehead dry, then he turned over on his face, and, resting his head on his arms, remained immovable for a good while. Suddenly he jumped up, and leaving the gun still on the ground, he ran crouching to a place where there was a tree, which formed a screen between him and the house. Then he stood upright; the top of the sunk fence was about level with his breast. Very slowly he put aside a branch cautiously and peered through. He had a full view of the dining-room windows, but he could not see from the low level at which he was, into the room. Once he saw a white cap pass; it was the head of one of the servants. He watched eagerly, scarcely breathing, and holding the branch tight as in a vice. After a while some one came to one of the windows. The blind was down nearly to the bottom panes. Clifford saw, in the space between, a

white mass ; gradually, and with uneven jerks, the blind was drawn up, and he could see a female figure, clad in a white dress. He watched her keenly. A tall slim figure appeared ; a bunch of red roses was in her girdle. It was Lawder's wife. Clifford glared at her furiously. She turned her head to speak. She was young and pretty ; fair-haired he could see, too. She tried to raise the sash of the window. In an instant Lawder was beside her, stooped and lifted it with a touch.

A curse burst from Clifford's lips ; if he had had the gun in his hands then he would have shot both. They disappeared, and he let go the branch and fell back into the ditch, gnashing his teeth with fury. He got up again after a while and resumed his watch. He was intensely thirsty ; his very tongue felt dry in his mouth, and his eyes were sore and strained. The time seemed to pass unnaturally slowly. He strove to catch some sound

from the house, but in vain. The whirr of a cricket in the dry grass, the scream of the swallows coming and going to their nests in the eaves, the buzz of the bees in the flower-beds or the lavender hedge—he could hear them all, and they seemed strangely loud and distinct. Once the breeze that had risen with the advent of the evening shook the leaves of a great sycamore near at hand with a rustle so loud and sudden, that he threw himself face downwards in the ditch. He got up a moment afterwards, and without again looking towards the house, stooped and moved back to where he had left the gun. There was a rhododendron and a clump of cabbage roses, all run to suckers and long brown stumps, close to the edge of the gully. It was barely a cover, but he raised his head cautiously and looked up once again over the edge.

There was Lawder, standing at the hall door. He was a fine-looking man, over six

feet in height, black-haired, and with a thick black beard. He wore a light-coloured, close-fitting shooting suit, which showed his brawny figure to advantage. He was in the act of lighting a cigar. To lift the gun from the ground at his feet, and run the barrel through the tangle of the bushes, was the work of a second. Clifford had taken aim; his finger was actually pressing the trigger, when the little boy ran out of the house after his father, and clinging to his leg asked some childish favour. It was a terrible moment; he shut his eyes, loosed his hold of the gun, groaning with mingled rage and anguish. Great drops rolled down his face; he could hear the tone distinctly, and the "Yes—yes, run and tell her," with which Lawder replied, laying his hand as he spoke on the little yellow head. The child went back into the house, Lawder took his cigar between his teeth, and had just stepped down without the porch, when the

shot of a gun burst upon the air. Lawder sprang upward with a smothered cry, and fell upon his face, his body stretched upon his own threshold.

In less time than it takes to tell it Clifford had flung the rifle behind him, and was running as fast as the wind along the gully. He crept through a hole in the next ditch, and then, as there was a thick tall hedge between him and the house, crossed the middle of the next field at a tearing rate. Down-hill all the way to the river he dashed along, keeping close to the hedgerows, through brambles and furze and nettles, until his hands and legs were bleeding and his clothes torn. The two and a half miles from Carna to the river were soon accomplished, and at last the broad expanse of the Suir lay before him. He glanced round cautiously before he left the shelter of the bank ; not a creature was in sight ; a cow drinking close by turned tail and ran off,

affrighted at his apparition. Then he jumped down and ran along the bank to where the tracks indicated the ford. First taking off his boots, which he was careful to keep dry, he plunged in. The water was breast deep ; he stooped his head and drank eagerly and deeply, splashing up water on his head and rubbing off the blood stains the thorns had left on his hands. He was soon across, and, refreshed and cooled, swung himself up the bank. He sat down for a breathless instant to pull on his boots. A man suddenly stepped from behind an ash tree and looked fixedly at him. Clifford replied to the look by a nod, and then cursed at him furiously, with almost hysterical rage. It was Mary Heffernan's son.

“ You've plenty of time,” said the man ; “ here.” He handed Clifford a bottle containing whisky ; he almost drained it, and flung the bottle into the grass. Heffernan

caught it up in time to prevent the contents all running out, and laughed.

“Keep close to the bushes, Charley, and get into the chapel from the back of the priest’s house ; they’re all waitin’ for ye.”

“I know that, damn you ! Get out of my road, you fool ! Are you going to stop there and be seen ?”

“No fear,” returned Heffernan leisurely. “Go on, man. Why, to look at you, one would think ye were frightened !”

Clifford was foaming at the mouth and trembling with rage and excitement ; he raised his arm as if to strike as he again set off up the field like a madman.

James Heffernan put the bottle, which was a small one, in his pocket, and then went and examined the bank where Clifford had climbed over ; there was no trace of his feet, not a pebble or blade of grass was disturbed, and the water that had dripped from his clothes

had all run off among the rank grass and docks. Five miles of a run that hot evening would dry his clothes, and if they were wet, who was there that would notice them?

The sun had set in an angry blaze, and the bats were flitting in the shadows of the church-yard, when Clifford, breathless and exhausted, walked into the parish church of Gortscreen. There were about a dozen men there, kneeling in different parts of the church. It was perfectly still, and growing dark. The crimson glow of the little sanctuary lamp that swung before the altar was just perceptible in the semi-gloom. The parish priest was in his confessional, and a hoarse mutter seemed to sound from it through the place. Clifford felt a sudden chill seize him as he entered and walked up the aisle and knelt for an instant at the altar-rail. Every eye in the church followed and watched him as he went, and meaning looks passed from one to the other.

He remained there for a moment ; his parched lips moved, but convulsively ; and then with a great effort he seized the altar railing and raised himself with its help, tottered down the aisle again, and half fell, half knelt, beside a pillar, where he remained in a kind of torpor for hours, until they took him away.

* * * *

Heffernan was arrested on suspicion, the ostensible reason being that his people were known to entertain ill-will to the agent ; but Heffernan's interests had been taken care of in the matter of an *alibi* just as effectually as Clifford's. Clifford was arrested after Heffernan had accounted for himself and had been discharged ; but overwhelming *alibis* were forthcoming for him, and the reward of five hundred pounds was added to the accumulations of blood-money in Dublin Castle.

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